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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE JULIAN GOLLOP GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Chaos for me. Being a huge fan of Dungeons & Dragons, this was nearly as good as the real thing.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Magic The Gathering Online
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I've never really been that into team strategy games to be honest, but I always did like the box art for *Laser Squad*. Guess I'll go for that.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World
Favourite game of all time:
Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World



JASON KELK

I was always absolutely terrible at it, but *Laser Squad* would be the one I enjoyed the most.
Expertise:
All things homebrew-related
Currently playing:
Viper Phase 1 (Arcade)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

I'm not well versed in Gollop's games, but I got my butt kicked a number of times when trying to get into *Laser Squad* and still enjoyed the game, so that's my choice.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Dark Nebula, Episode Two
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

Laser Squad was absorbing and fresh and developed a warmongering streak within me that shows no sign of waning. Scary, eh?
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Mirror's Edge on iPad
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



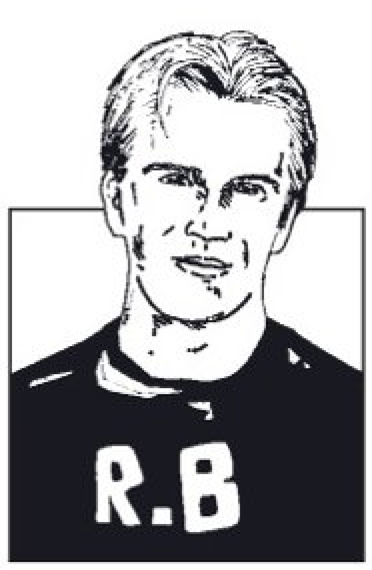
ASHLEY DAY

Rebelstar Raiders on the Game Boy Advance. It may not be his best known but this modern handheld classic kept me amused for many an hour a few years ago.
Expertise:
The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant Of The Plume
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



PAUL DAVIES

UFO: Enemy Unknown, though only because I had to swot up on it for another game.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
PES 2011 and *Super Street Fighter IV*
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



RICHARD BURTON

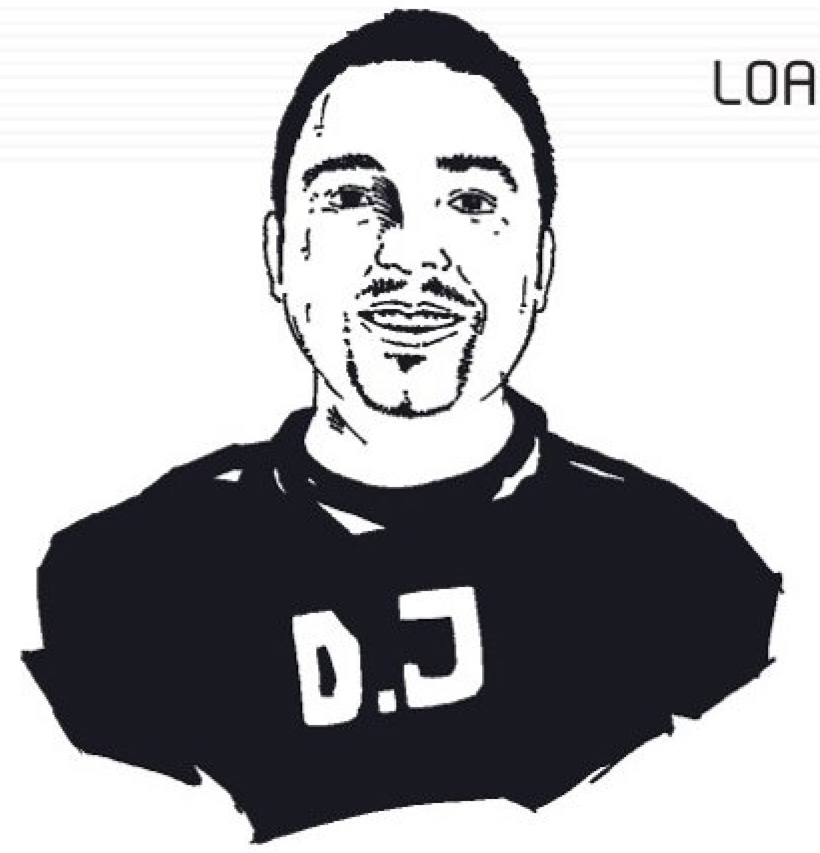
Rebelstar – fantastic strategy game with the merest tinge of adventure. It accounted for hours of gameplay and all for a measly £1.99 too.
Expertise: Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Leather Goddesses Of Phobos
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



PAUL DRURY

Strategy games don't really waggle my joystick, but I remember being intrigued by *Enemy Unknown* on the PSone, in between *WipEout* and *Tekken* sessions.
Expertise:
Games with prizes
Currently playing:
Dragon Quest IX
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

LOADING...



This month we're introducing a brand new feature entitled Future Classic. The idea behind it is to investigate last-gen games that are so good we guarantee you'll be playing them in a decade's time. This month's title is the Game Boy Advance's excellent reboot of Nintendo's original *Metroid* game, but future features will include games from the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube.

So does this mean that Retro Gamer is selling out and forgetting its core audience? Of course it doesn't. There are absolutely hundreds of games that we haven't managed to get around to yet, so it would be foolish to start filling every issue with last-gen titles. On the other hand it's important to remember that some of the machines I've mentioned are now nearly a decade old and are, to younger readers, retro machines anyway.

Retro Gamer has always been a careful balancing act – the sheer diversity you can find in each issue of the magazine is testament to that – so just consider this to be another plate to keep spinning.

Enjoy the magazine,





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>> Load 81 Breathing new life into classic games



FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…







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"The best 2D Metroid game we've ever played"

Darran Jones







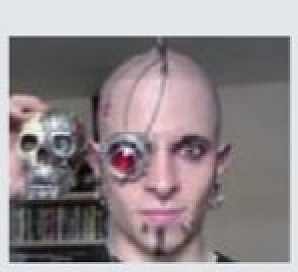


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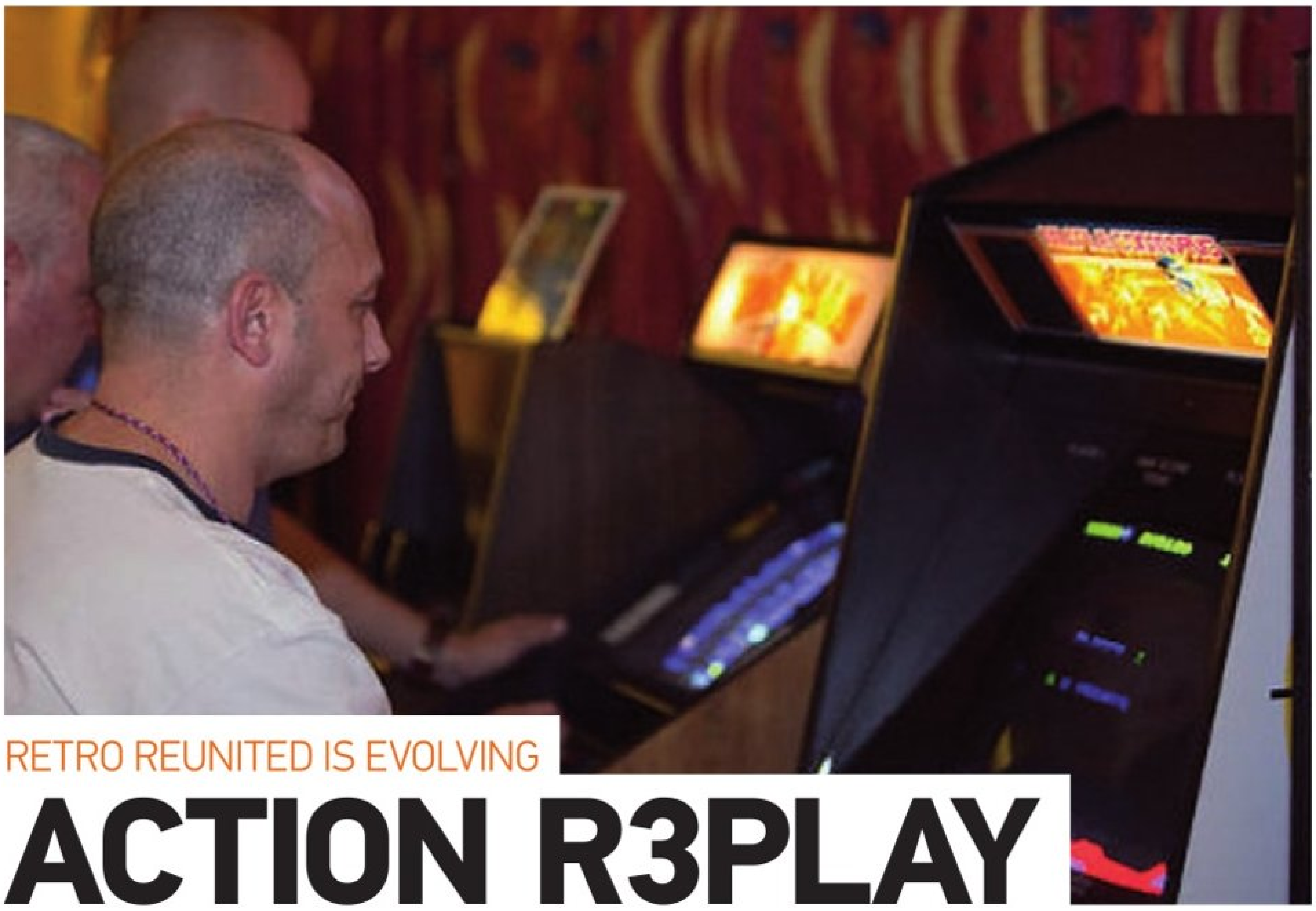
>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's been a relatively quiet month in the world of retro, so we've decided to focus on what could well be the biggest gaming event of the year. Join us as we speak to Gordon Sinclair and get the lowdown on all things R3PLAY related.

* CONTENTS





RETRO REUNITED IS EVOLVING

ACTION R3PLAY

R3PLAY is promising to be one of the best gaming events of the year when it launches on 6 November. Its co-founder Gordon Sinclair is no stranger to events, having been behind the excellent Retro Reunited, but now he's back with a new gig that is set to outdo his last in every possible way. We spoke to Gordon in order to find out what's going on.

Retro Gamer: How has the reception been for R3PLAY?
Gordon Sinclair: The reception has been absolutely great. We have always known that there is a fantastic core community of retro gamers who will get behind this kind of event, but this has certainly gone beyond the usual forums and websites that support us. We were keen to get more modern gamers to attend – they are the future retro gamers, after all – and the lure of key titles such as *Super Street Fighter IV* and *FIFA 11* seems to have ignited their interest.

RG: So are you hoping it will be a bigger project than your last gig?
GS: Yes indeed! In terms of both visitor numbers and the size of the event itself the event is probably twice as big as Retro Reunited. We have expanded virtually every aspect of the show and included plenty of new things. A regular request at previous shows has been for more arcade machines and some pinball tables, so we are happy to oblige on both fronts. It has taken a far bigger team to make all this happen, though, so the first thing we did was to form the Computing and Gaming Events Union (**www.cgeu.info**). The CGEU is made up of the organisers of most of the retro gaming events that have been staged over the last few years, and this wealth of experience has given us a fantastic foundation to make R3PLAY a very special event that everyone can enjoy.

RG: So what famous names can we expect to see at R3PLAY?
GS: The special guests are still being agreed on at the moment, but we do expect to have a number of veteran game makers who are still going strong in the industry today. We were lucky enough to be contacted by BAFTA a couple of months back, who were keen to team up and host a BAFTA videogame panel, and they have some great contacts in the industry, so we will be taking full advantage of the opportunity.

RG: What will R3PLAY offer over your previous events?
GS: The difference between R3PLAY and previous events like Retro Reunited or Byte Back is that this is our biggest show to date so we wanted to make this more of a full-scale expo than a small community event. We will still maintain the community feel, but everything will be far better organised, better presented and better supported by the games industry. We are also being supported by some great companies such as BAFTA, Guinness World Records, Gamestation and, of course, Imagine Publishing. None of that was possible when we first started.

RG: What companies can we expect to see at the event?
GS: Again, our final list hasn't been finalised, but from a purely retro perspective we will be hosting an Ocean Software showcase. We will be running a number of systems playing Ocean games and plenty of old programmers, musicians and artists from the company will be on-hand to chat to visitors about what life was like in the heyday of the company. We also have Sumo Digital coming along. Sumo rose from the ashes of Gremlin Interactive and made





» R3PLAY will boast more than twice the number of playable systems of similar events.

> **"More than anything these events are about the gamers"**
>
> SINCLAIR'S SECRET TO A SUCCESSFUL RETRO SHOW

their name writing games for Sega such as the superb home console conversions of *OutRun 2* and more recently with the new *Doctor Who* games for the BBC. They are one of the UK's top developers and tell us that they are planning something special, so I am as excited as anyone to see what they bring.

Through our partnership with Gamestation, who will be hosting the modern gaming area, we have been able to approach a number of top companies like Capcom, Activision and EA, who should be showing off some of their new releases for the Christmas period.

RG: Why will R3PLAY be a mixture of modern and classic gaming?
GS: It is a fact that most gamers are retro lovers; they just don't know it. Ask any modern gamer about their early days and they will almost always go off into a rose-tinted world where they got their first console or computer and will wax lyrical about the games they used to love. But when you ask them why they don't still play games like that via emulation or by picking up a machine on the cheap they more often than not will tell you that they didn't realise it was possible and will rush off to research it. We want to open people's eyes to the amazing retro scene that is out there. We want to celebrate games because, old or new, it is the game and the gamer that counts.

RG: So how many people are you expecting to be visiting R3PLAY?
GS: We are expecting somewhere around 500-600 per day at the show.

RG: How many game systems do you hope to have up and running?
GS: We are planning to have around 300 machines available to play, which is more than double the number at previous shows. They will be made up of retro consoles, retro computers, classic arcade cabs, pinball tables and modern consoles.

RG: Will Acorn World be returning?
GS: Acorn World will not be appearing as part of R3PLAY, though we will have a number of Acorn machines there. Acorn World will definitely return in 2011, though, so keep your eyes on **www.acornworld.co.uk** for details later in the year.

RG: What competitions can we expect to see there?
GS: We won't be announcing the full itinerary until the actual event, but there will be lots going on. From the super competitive fighting game competitions, to *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer* cups, shoot-'em-up high score battles and driving game championships. We are also planning a special retro competition, but I don't want to give too much away just yet.

RG: Why do you think these events remain so popular?
GS: Games never go out of style; they just get retro, so these shows provide a unique look back as well as forward. I think that as gaming has evolved from the two-player games that you played while sat next to each other to the new online world where you are a thousand miles from your opponent, people have lost a little of the magic. Getting together with a few hundred gamers brings that all back and gives you the opportunity to show your victory dance to the friend you have just annihilated. But more than anything these events are about the gamers. It is about people getting together to play, drink, talk, or just watch. We provide the venue and the visitors make the show!

RG: Can people still buy tickets?
GS: They certainly can. Tickets are available via **www.r3play.info**. *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» What are you most looking forward to at R3PLAY?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Fat Trucker
More than anything I'm looking forward to meeting the forum folk and perhaps having a sherry or two over aperitifs later in the evening.
To be honest, though, I'm really looking forward to the whole event. Last one I went to was CGEUK in Croydon about five years ago.

Ralph Milne's Left Foot
Finally meeting people I have conversed with for years on various different retro-related doo dahs.

Graedient
Looking forward to meeting some people from here, and it's my first retro event too. I'll be the six-foot Geordie, with a couple of smaller Geordies.

Subzero
I chose 'the old games', however I'm also looking forward to meeting some friends there and hopefully making some new friends too.

Toxiedogg
I went with 'meeting people'. It's the first event I've ventured to as well, and it will be fun to put some names to faces. Also to hopefully show that I'm not as crazy as I sometimes come across as on here.

MikeFishCake
Okay, I chose 'old games' but after seeing the current results and what everyone is saying, I now feel like a real unsociable sod.

sscott
Looking forward to meeting all the regulars plus new people who have not been to previous shows. When I ran my own event, as previous show runners know, it can be a little hard to enjoy yourself and relax as much as you should.

pforson
I like staying in hotels. It makes me feel special. I also like road trips and stroking Felgekarp's beard.

Retrogarden
Having a laugh playing games and a decent competition on *Street Fighter*. Drinks and good banter as well.

FORUM OPINION

What are you most looking forward to about R3PLAY?



retrocolumns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Rod Hull and Emus

The year is 2010. We are living in the future, and for the most part, it's pretty crap.

As a kid, I was promised I would have so much by now – hover cars, laser guns, and I was definitely told I would be wearing a silver suit made out of something that looked like BacoFoil but is actually able to withstand the freezing temperatures of space. And I ain't got none of that stuff.

But it's not all doom and gloom. I do have some cool things that were never mentioned on *Star Trek* or *Space: 1999*. I have access to pretty much every videogame for every console ever made, all just a few clicks away. Well, more than just a few clicks for me. I'm not as technically proficient as I would have everyone believe, and I really struggle getting emulators to work. I know, they're all pretty straightforward, but I just can't seem to do it.

Luckily for me, even emus are becoming unnecessary as old games become available on things even I can work. Who remembers the Amstrad E-mailer? A horrid-looking phone with a ridiculous name, that allowed you to access your emails for quite a considerable charge? It was ugly and rubbish. But, it did allow you to play Spectrum games on it. Strangely, that didn't motivate many people to buy it. Nice idea, wrong time.

I cannot tell you how excited I was to find out that one of my favourite games of all time was available for the iPhone. As a kid, I loved *Repton*. It is utter genius. How cool to have it on my phone, so I can have a go any time I like? Since I installed it, I haven't stopped playing it. I miss a bigger screen and the comforting BBC keyboard, but it'll do for me.

I was on holiday recently, staying with family in Greece. My 11-year-old nephew, Alexandros, was looking at my phone and asking what games I had. I showed him *GTA, Angry Birds* and a few others and, for a while, I was pretty cool. I then got excited and remembered *Repton*. "Hey man, wait until you see THIS!" I exclaimed, a tad more excited than I should have been, my coolness already slipping by the use of the phrase 'hey man'.

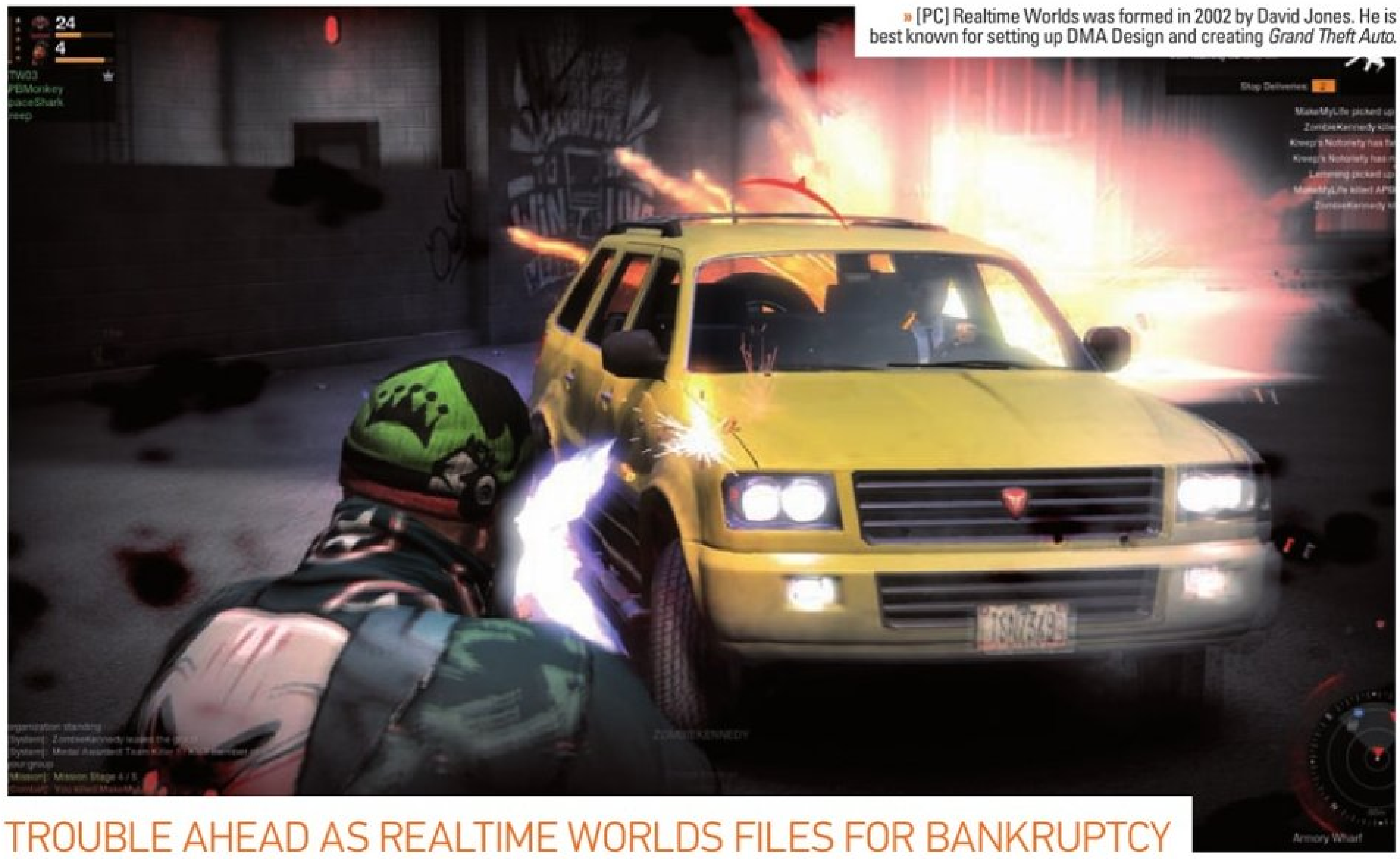
I loaded the game and played it for a bit, then offered it to him for a go. He shrugged his shoulders, mumbled something in Greek and wandered away. I was confused, and then it hit me. I was an old man showing him the equivalent of a stick and a hoop. I might as well have waved some leaves in his face and said, 'This is what I used to play with as a boy. Look, they move and stuff.'

Oh well. His loss. Me? I've got some boulders to shift and some diamond type things to collect.



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

As a kid, I was promised a silver suit made out of BacoFoil



» [PC] Realtime Worlds was formed in 2002 by David Jones. He is best known for setting up DMA Design and creating *Grand Theft Auto*.

TROUBLE AHEAD AS REALTIME WORLDS FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

"LET'S GO"

The UK gaming industry received a cataclysmic blow in August, with the revelation that Dundee-based developer Realtime Worlds had gone into administration and was in the process of being sold off to other publishers.

First formed in 2002, Realtime Worlds was founded by David Jones, who had found tremendous success with DMA Design and classic franchises like *Lemmings* and *Grand Theft Auto* in the early Nineties. Its first officially released game was 2007's sandbox shooter *Crackdown* for the Xbox 360, which recently received a sequel, apparently made by many former members of Realtime Worlds, who had left the company to form Ruffian Games in 2008.

It would appear that the main reason for Realtime Worlds' demise is the long-overdue release of *APB: All Points Bulletin*: an ambitious and anticipated MMORPG featuring many elements that appear in both *Crackdown* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Indeed, rumours were rife that Jones even approached Rockstar Games at one stage with plans to make it into an actual *GTA* online game, although Realtime Worlds has always strongly denied them.

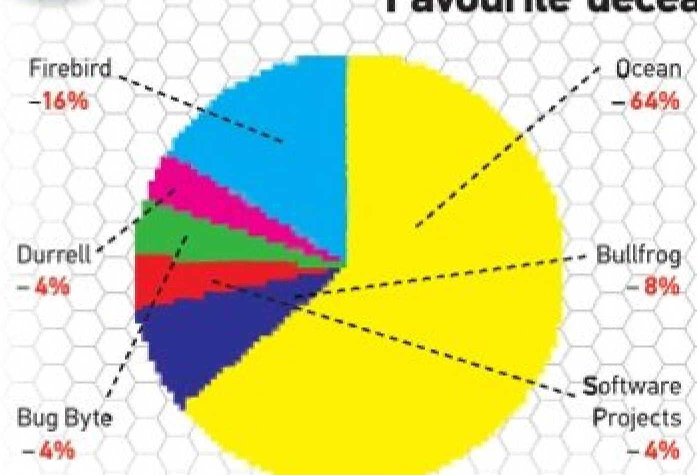
Initially due for a 2008 release and described by Realtime Worlds' executive Colin Macdonald as "the bastard child of everything we've been striving towards over the past 15-20 years", *APB* was eventually released in 2010, with Realtime Worlds receiving over £100 million in investments in the years leading up to its release. Controversy surrounded *APB*'s release after an embargo was set up that prevented anyone from reviewing the game until a week after it was released, and once the feedback did start trickling in, it was lukewarm to say the least. It was also hampered by a strange subscription model that would see potential subscribers paying for additional hours online – although the first 50 hours of gameplay were free – which was seen as an unstable model next to the established system of monthly fees for unlimited play.

Six weeks after *APB* was finally released, Realtime Worlds went into administration and announced the loss of at least 60 jobs – although many unofficial sources state the actual number as being far higher – and the closure of its Colorado-based US office. Several publishers, including Activision, have already shown an interest in Realtime Worlds' assets, so some jobs may hopefully be saved. It's nevertheless a crushing disappointment and a difficult time for all the staff of the company, and the loss of such a prominent studio is also likely to have a knock-on effect for the UK games industry in general. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Favourite deceased UK software company



"Ocean, for the sole fact that they made *Waterworld* on the Virtual Boy" – **Miketendo**

"Of the companies listed I think Durrell, as I enjoyed most of their games, and they often did something a little bit different. Also they made *Turbo Esprit*, a truly cool game" – **ipmarks**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» CD32 Forever

Fans of the Amiga may be interested to know that one of its best emulators has recently received a massive overhaul. In addition to being fully compatible with Windows 7, Amiga Forever now features an enhanced 'export to device' feature for transferring game saves to USB, a far better user interface, and new preset configurations for both the CDTV and CD32. Head to **www.amigaforever.com** for more information.



» Game On

Sega has announced the return of one of its popular franchises, and while it's not the sequel to *Panzer Dragoon Saga* that we've been fervently waiting for, it still looks very promising. Currently announced only for the PlayStation 3 and featuring both Move and 3D technology, *Virtua Tennis 4* will be appearing some time in 2011. More news as we get it.



» Parasitic PSP

Square Enix has just announced that the third part of its *Parasite Eve* series will be heading to the PSP. Recently revealed in popular Japanese magazine *Famitsu*, little is known about the game except that its full title is *The 3rd Birthday*. There's also no news of a UK release, so in the meantime we've included a screenshot from *Parasite Eve II*, which was released on the PSone.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

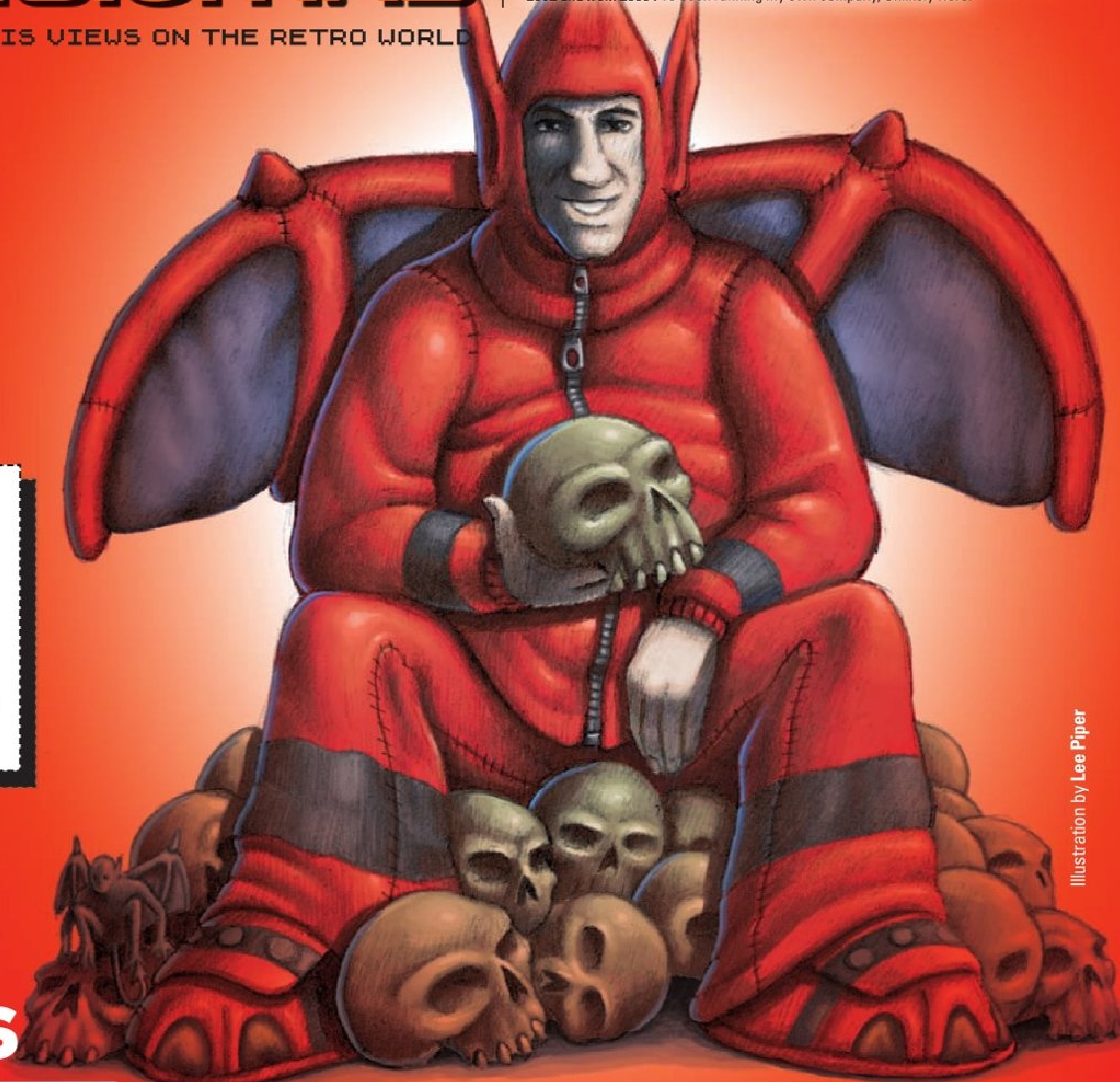


Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Ode to Ghouls 'N Ghosts

For me, this ranks among the most finely crafted games ever. To you it might look like a load of old bollocks. I am right, though! Hail Knight Arthur and his (almost) impossible quest!

This is my game.

Rightly or wrongly, I'm still judging the greatness potential of today's videogames using Capcom's *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* as a benchmark. To be fair on the hundreds of games that fall short, not even Capcom could get near it with *Maximo* on the PlayStation, nor lately *Ghosts 'N Goblins* for the iPhone. In the realm of arcade platform adventures, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is AC/DC's *Back In Black*, Cameron's *Terminator 2*.

Ghouls 'N Ghosts was one of two games that arrived with my imported Mega Drive in 1989 – the other was *Altered Beast*, but never mind. Prior to this my experience with console games had been mostly *R-Type* and *Double Dragon* on my mate's Master System. *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* wasn't even in the Manchester arcades at this point. I remember I'd been drooling over a screenshot in *Computer & Video Games' Complete Guide To Consoles*, which showed the hero unleashing his lightning attack special move in what is now a legendary pose. It turns out that Paul Glancey took this screenshot.

Anyway, the thing about *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was and still is that it has such fabulous design, animation and music that the instant brick wall of a learning curve takes a while to register. The goal is all about seeing the next bit, if only a few inches along, that promises something more incredible every step of the way. To survive the bit beforehand requires laser-beam focus, lightning-speed reactions, and that bizarre 'in the zone' luck that I tried replicating with gallons of black coffee and dark chocolate digestives. I definitely didn't smell very nice.

21 years later, games like Capcom's own *Resident Evil* and Epic Games' *Gears Of War* are the closest I've found to matching *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* for difficulty balanced with menace and reward. However, their heroes are shambling buffoons compared to Knight Arthur, and you're never going to beat Lucifer as a final boss. Unless you fight God, but he'd be a crap-looking videogame character that not even Todd McFarlane toys could do a number on.

As many of you will know, the ultimate *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* gag was to have you reach the end, only to plonk you back at the beginning to earn the full ending. My mate and I honestly thought our copy of the game was broken, mainly because our *Altered Beast* was totally screwed. We initially thought the strange custard pie weapon – in fact the princess's magic amulet – was a glitch, but it was doing a great job of killing skeletons so we kept going.

It's pathetic, I know, but to this day my proudest moment of gaming was standing in a Manchester Piccadilly arcade and completing *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* on one credit. There was a crowd and everything. Though not too close, because I probably reeked of coffee and wheat.

Ghouls 'N Ghosts is AC/DC's Back In Black, Cameron's Terminator 2

SHMUP HEAVEN

SHOOT-'EM-UP KING CAVE ANNOUNCES SEVERAL NEW GAMES

The shmup genre may be all but dead in the West – from a retail point, at least – but it continues to thrive in Japan.

Cave is steadily porting some of its most popular games to the 360, and a recent announcement at its Cave Festival revealed that even more great shooters are on the way. *Pink Sweets* and *Muchi Muchi Pork* are being released in the form of an excellent double pack, and while it won't feature high-res upgrades like some recent Cave shooters, both titles will include brand new arranged modes that are sure to challenge hardcore shmup fans who have already invested in the original PCBs.

The 360 love continued, as Cave also revealed that *DoDonPachi Resurrection* – seen by some as the best game in the series – will also be heading to Microsoft's console. Again, there's no news of any high-res mode, but Cave has confirmed that it will feature two brand new arranged modes when it arrives in Japan in November.

Last, but by no means least, Cave also confirmed that *Dangun Feveron* was on the way, although it was reluctant to reveal what machine it would be on. The smart money is that it will be following *Guwange*, due for release in October, and receiving a digital release on Xbox Live Arcade, but Cave is remaining tight-lipped at the moment. Add in its upcoming iPhone port of *DoDonPachi Resurrection* and it would appear that the future remains bright for one of Japan's most prolific shmup developers.





Other shoot-'em-up news at the event saw Milestone announcing that *Radilgy Noah* and *Radilgy Noah Massive* would be getting a 360 release in October. Like many of Cave's announcements, the release wouldn't be receiving a high-res update, but it will contain lots of new gameplay modes.

No news on whether any of these titles will be region free, but considering that Cave recently released *Death Smiles* in the US, we'd say it's unlikely, so there's never been a better time to invest in a Japanese machine. It would appear that, for Cave and Milestone at least, bullet hell is going to be more akin to bullet heaven in the immediate future. *

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



I'm a huge Cave fan, having recently invested in its entire 360 back catalogue, so this news pleases me greatly. After recently playing through *Guwange*, I'm hoping that the nutty *Dangun Feveron* gets released on XBLA as well.

Stuart



Espgaluda II was exceptionally good on the iPhone, so I can't wait to see how Cave handles the port of *DoDonPachi Resurrection*. I don't have a Japanese Xbox, so I'll be forcing Darran to bring his into work. All for reviewing, of course.

David



When you consider that Cave is a master of the arcade shoot-'em-up and is famed for its use of Engrish – 'Violator and subject to severe penalties and will be prosecuted to the full extent of the jam' – you can't fail to fall for the Japanese charms. Bring them on.





WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 14

Kane & Lynch 2

KANE AND LYNCH'S new adventure may be amazingly short and heavy on the gore, but it does have a polished AI partner, who makes the likes of *Resident Evil 5*'s Sheva look lobotomised.

It's even better with a friend in tow, and we began to imagine what it would look like if it was transported to the humble Commodore 64. One piece of photo wizardry from our boy Trevor and we have our answer. And man, do we want to play it.



THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

20-sided fuzzy dice danglers

Price: $9.99 (approx £6.50)
From: www.thinkgeek.com

We're not sure whether you're legally allowed to dangle hanging dice from your rear-view mirror any more; we think this activity may have been outlawed in 1998. If this is the case, then you could always buy these dice and wear them around your neck like a large, novelty cowboy neck-tie. As you can see, they're based on d20 dice, so if you do get into a fight with an angry cowboy you can always summon Ajani Galdmane to rip his throat out (warning: this may not actually be possible).



Mega Drive card holder

Price: $34.10 (approx £21)
From: www.strapya-world.com

These business cards holders from Japan might be on the pricey side, but here's our thinking: if you have your own business cards then chances are you can probably afford one of these to keep them in. Produced by Banpresto, these plastic business card holders are made to look like tiny Japanese Mega Drive consoles. They were also very close to being our treasure of this month, but then we remembered business card holders are undeniably sad and we understandably changed our minds.





Predator T-shirt

Price: £19
From: www.nerdoh.com

The *Predator* games might be very rubbish, and considering there's only officially one-and-a-half good movies in the entire film series it's a wonder the series has become so popular. We can only put it down to the first movie being one of the most quotable action films in the universe, that and Arnie's moving and Oscar-worthy portrayal of a former Green Beret playing hide-and-seek with an alien inside a rainforest.

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Universal Gadget Wrist Charger

■ **RRP:** $34.99 (approx £22) ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

We selected the treasure this month on the grounds that it's on holiday where we most use our handhelds – a sad, but true, fact. As such, packing mains chargers can be a pain, and impractical as you can only play your dead machine near plug sockets offering free electricity, which is actually a lot rarer than you think – especially in remote parts of Costa Rica. Also, batteries are not really an option either with newer handhelds. So the best answer lies in this handy wrist charger, which straps around your wrist and plugs into plenty of electronic devices – including mobile phones, MP3 players and portable gaming systems – and buys you some time to locate an internet café. Then, when you've found one, simply order an ice tea, charge this baby up off a PC and away you go – you're set for more gaming action. The Gadget Wrist Charger is compatible with the DS Lite/DSi and the PSP.





Pac-Man CD case

Price: £11.99
From: www.squareeyed.co.uk

Now you'd think these official *Pac-Man* CD holders would be circular, right? Seeing as Pac-Man is an iconic yellow circle and CDs are circular and all. But in fact they're square – which is like the polar opposite of a circle. Despite its questionable shape, this CD holder still proves pretty useful. It holds up to 24 CDs, DVDs or PlayStation games – whatever floats your disc-shaped containment boat. It also comes with a handy *Pac-Man* zip tag to ensure you never lose the end of the zip. Genius.



Aero Blasters

Price: £17.99
From: www.genkivideogames.co.uk

If it's import games you're after then look no further than Genki Videogames. The online retailer always impresses us with its nice and reasonably priced selection of import games. Here's a copy of the excellent side-scrolling blaster *Aero Blasters* for the PC-Engine. The game's novel (for its day) two-player simultaneous co-op mode makes it a must own for any shoot-'em-up collection.

Tekken T-shirt

Price: £14.95
From: www.retrogt.com

Following Capcom's announcement that there's to be a *Tekken/Street Fighter* crossover game, what better way to get wrapped up in the forthcoming beat-'em-up mania than through purchasing one of these nice-looking *Tekken* T-shirts from Retro GT? Wear it on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, and then purchase a *Street Fighter* shirt (not seen here) to wear on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

32X modification

Price: £15 plus return postage
From: www.consolepassion.co.uk

Those who rushed out and bought a 32X after reading our feature on ill-fated add-on in issue 77 might be interested in getting it modified to play titles from any region, and see it display games in full-screen at 60Hz. Visit Console Passion to make it happen for a cool £15. Please note, however, that you will need a modified Mega Drive to slot your 32X into. Don't panic though, as they offer that service too.



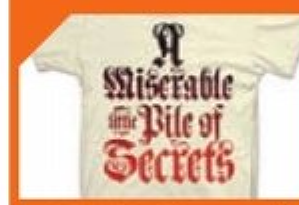
Road Fighter

Price: £28.99
From: www.rewind-gaming.co.uk

Those looking for rare and obscure games for their older machines and computers should really take time to check out Rewind Gaming. It has a selection of gaming rarities for machines ranging from the Electron to the Game.com. Here's a copy of Konami's excellent *Road Fighter* for the MSX. It's a favourite in the office and a great conversion to boot – hence why we've flagged it up.



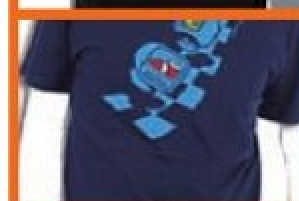
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



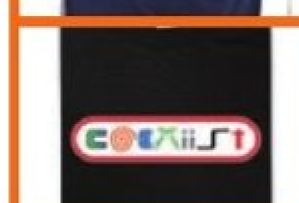
01 A Miserable Little Pile of Secrets T-shirt
- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Buy it from:** http://meatbun.us/store/



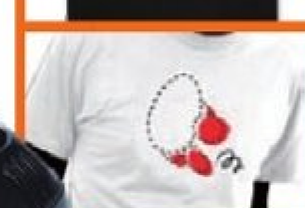
02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
- **RRP:** $14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

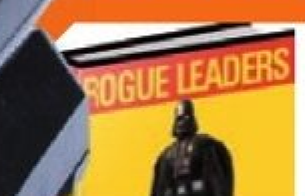


04 Coexist T-shirt
- **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
- **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
- **Author:** Brett Weiss
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
- **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
- **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



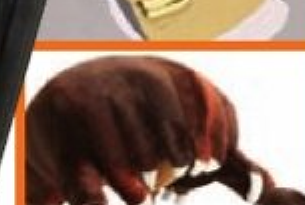
01 Mega Drive Card Holder
- **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
- **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
- **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



02 Tabletop Arcade Machine
- **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
- **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
- **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
- **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
- **RRP:** £5
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



*A MOMENT WITH...

Lorne Lanning

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes met Lorne Lanning, creator of Oddworld

Who is Lorne Lanning?

He created the *Oddworld* series. He also lent his voice to many of the characters including Abe, Munch and Stranger. Lanning closed his game studio in 2005 to concentrate on TV and film, but fresh gaming plans have been announced.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Stranger's Wrath. It's the culmination of many things we learned over the years in development and gameplay.

What is your proudest memory?
I think it was at GDC in 2000 when Bill Gates was live on stage and I was like 40 feet tall on the big screen behind him. For those few moments I was bigger than the richest guy in the world. Of course, nobody took a picture and I've never been able to get a video. Figures.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
When people lie. It always catches me off guard and typically precedes a larger crisis.

Who in the industry do you most admire?
After seeing Gaikai, I'd have to say David Perry gets the vote for 2010. He's like the Energizer Bunny. He keeps coming back but this round he's a serious force that is going to have game-changing impact.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
Maybe this is silly, but I like to think that our games inspired people, and hopefully this came into their lives at moments when they most needed it.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
Civilization II. The systems and infinite possibilities still leave me blown away.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
The ability to meet fascinating people from all over the world and from different walks of life. It's been the greatest reward.

What's your best memory of being in the games industry?
Definitely getting an all-expense-paid trip to the most incredible resort on a private island in Queensland. Pretty fabulous.

Can you share an interesting anecdote from your time in the industry?
There is one that I've been trying to figure out since it happened, as I knew there was great wisdom in what I was told, but as a content creator it was very unintuitive for me to figure out how someone like myself could apply it.

Sherry McKenna [Oddworld CEO and co-founder] and I were having dinner in Tokyo with Masayoshi Son, the richest man in Japan. He was the founder of SoftBank and he was starting a new company called GameBank, aiming to distribute console games. He liked Abe but this was before Abe was even released and he was telling us his story over dinner.

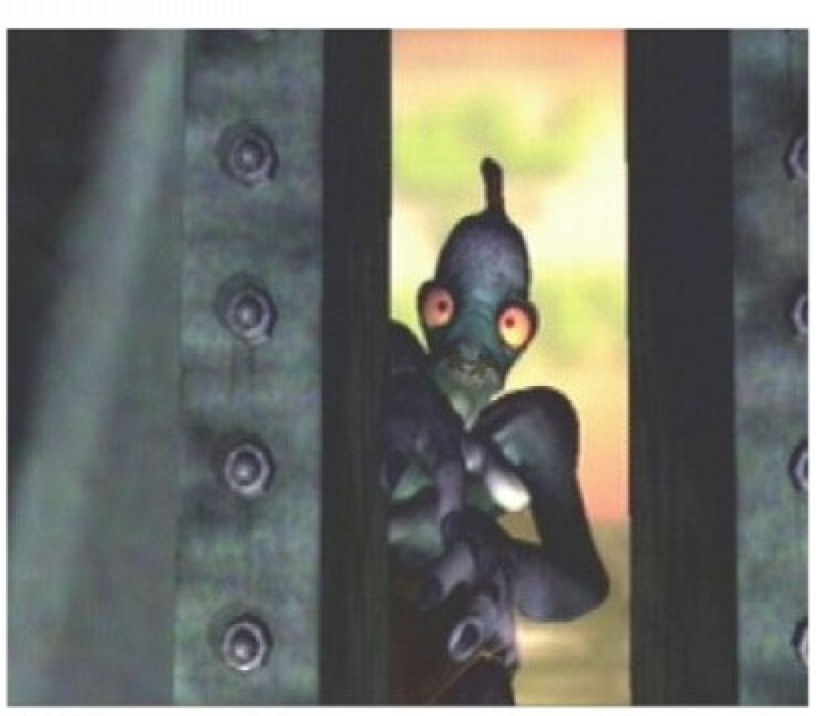
He said he had graduated from Stanford University and had at least 100 patents to his name already. But he was also realising that the likelihood that any one of his patents might become a success was quite dim, so he started thinking maybe he could figure out a way to deal with the patents that were already the most successful.

This led to his founding SoftBank and their beginning in becoming the most powerful distributor of software products in Japan. He was brilliant, charming, funny, and inspiring. He still had the energy of a teenager. He was excited about things that one wouldn't suspect someone of his stature to be excited by. His intelligence and warm character combined with his simple message left an impact on me that, ever since, I've been trying to figure out how to do something closer to in my own work.



» [PC] *Abe's Oddysee* has held up particularly well today.





» [PC] It's easy to see why Lanning was so keen to move *Oddworld* into films when you see how ahead of their time the games' CG cut-scenes were.

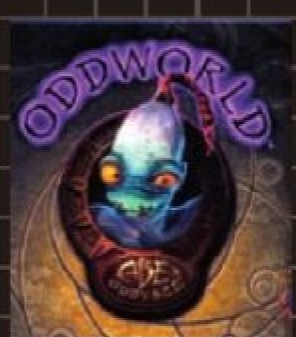


How has the industry changed?
It seemed like it was evolving slow as a dinosaur, but then in the last few years the disruption has created that frenzy that makes it feel like the early Nineties again. It's gone from garage shops, to huge publisher/developers, back to garage shops via social and casual app games. Very strange transitions and they are coming at more rapid rates. Check out Scott Steinberg's video blogs, as I think he covers it pretty well. *

17 September – 14 October

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



19 September 1997
■ The first game in the *Oddworld* franchise, *Abe's Oddysee*, is released in Europe on the PlayStation.



20 September 1984
■ Acornsoft releases a new space trading game on the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron. *Elite* is born.



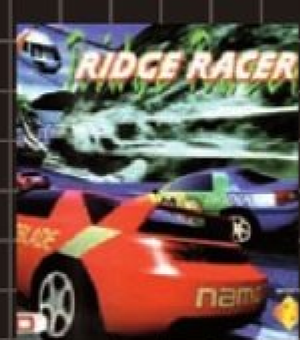
23 September 2005
■ The fifth and final instalment in the *Myst* adventure series, *End Of Ages*, is released.



23 September 2005
■ The fourth game in the *Burnout* series, *Burnout Revenge*, is released in Europe on the PS2 and Xbox.



29 September 1995
■ Same day, same year and another racing series begins… The futuristic racer, *WipEout*, debuts on the PSone across Europe.



29 September 1995
■ The first game in Namco's ongoing racing game franchise, *Ridge Racer*, is launched in Europe on the PlayStation.

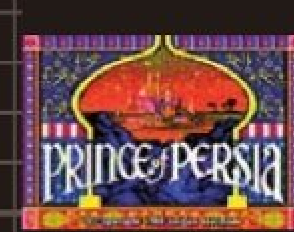
28 September 2005
■ Square Enix announces that the acquisition of fellow publisher Taito has finally been completed.

24 September 2002
■ Microsoft acquires the developer Rare, formerly known as Ultimate Play The Game. Yours for just $375 million.

1 October 1979
■ Activision, currently the biggest videogames publisher in the world, is formed.



1 October 1999
■ Horror, dinosaurs, shooting… what's not to like in *Dino Crisis*, a new survival franchise launched on the PlayStation.



3 October 1989
■ Developed and published by Brøderbund, *Prince Of Persia* makes its videogame debut on the Apple IIc.



4 October 2002
■ *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin* is released in the UK on the Xbox and PS2.



7 October 1985
■ Welcome to the Fantasy Zone! Sega's *Space Harrier* hits the arcades. Get ready…



7 October 1983
■ Memotech releases its first home computer, the stylishly black cased MTX-500. Nice machine, not much software.



6 October 1995
■ Europe sees the release of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* on the SNES.



6 October 1990
■ Sega's handheld games machine, the Game Gear, makes its worldwide retail debut in Japan.



7 October 2003
■ Nokia releases the N-Gage, a mobile phone masquerading as a handheld console, in America to a lukewarm response.



7 October 2005
■ The pet simulation game *Nintendogs* is released in the UK on the Nintendo DS handheld. Poop scoop not included.



13 October 1995
■ Sega releases the Nomad handheld console in the USA. It is essentially a portable Mega Drive capable of taking the same cartridges.



14 October 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

retro GAMER

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



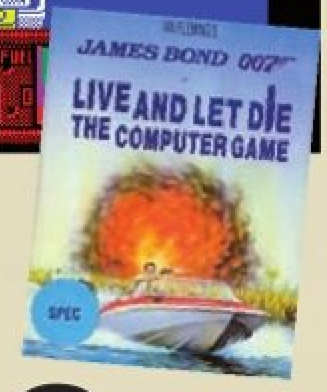
» [Amiga] Pac is back and has found a new dimension. A simple yet engrossing game.

» [Commodore 64] Simply one of the slickest, most playable shoot-'em-ups ever made for the C64.



» [Spectrum] The name's Bored… James Bored – licensed to grow old due to monotony and dull gameplay.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1988

OCTOBER 1988 – coin-op conversion mayhem, 007 is back, no pot of gold for Rainbow Arts, you say R-Type, I say Katakis, Pac-Man is back man while Jordan is back on court. Richard Burton slam dunks a Hob Nob into a cup of tea…

Domark revealed the stirring news that it had signed a three-year deal with Tengen Inc, a subsidiary of Atari Games, to convert eight arcade coin-ops onto home micros. Five games were initially revealed, with a further three to be finalised. The first wave of games included *Toobin'*, *Dragon Spirit* and *Xybots*.

Domark had problems too, this time with Bond… James Bond. It was readying its third 007 title, *Live And Let Die*, for launch, but the realisation that the less-than-impressive in-house result wouldn't cut the mustard meant drastic action. It looked elsewhere for a ready-made replacement.

Fortunately Elite Systems was working on a speedboat game called *Aquablast*, an interesting blend of *RoadBlasters* and the water section of *Spy Hunter*, which would tie in nicely with the big speedboat chase that takes place during the movie. Domark asked Elite if it might consider allowing it to use the game, and Elite agreed as long as it received equal credit, which it did, although it is unknown whether it also received an equal share of the profits.

The game itself wasn't hugely successful and proved to be fairly humdrum. We assume that Domark's original effort must have been a real stinker…

Still, things couldn't be as bad as they were at Rainbow Arts. Having just had its fantastic *Mario*-style platform game, *The Great Giana Sisters*, pulled from shops because Nintendo took a dim view of the similarity to its own moustachioed platforming output, it happened again… and again…

As a knock-on effect from the *Giana Sisters* withdrawal, the proposed sequel, *The Great Giana Sisters II: Arthur And Martha In Future World*, never got beyond the wishful-thinking stage of planning.

And to add to Rainbow's woes, Mediagenic – that's Activision in old money – didn't like the sound of its new game *Katakis*, which had a distinctly *R-Type* feel to it. Mediagenic had just released its own official conversion of *R-Type* this very month, and presumably feared that its slice of the shoot-'em-up pie could be scoffed by others looking to cash in on the game.

An injunction was promptly served with the threat of legal action, and *Katakis* remained unreleased. The C64 version had managed to sneak into stores for a couple of weeks but was promptly recalled too.

However, to get around this problem Rainbow Arts altered *Katakis* and released it as *Denaris* on the C64. The crux of the problem Mediagenic had with Rainbow Arts and the coders behind *Katakis/Denaris* was that they were actually the people developing *R-Type*. A conflict of interests doesn't really cover it…

Grandslam was getting some coin-op action with the news that its conversions of Namco's *Pac-Mania* were complete.



» [Commodore 64] Just awful. Big names, crap graphics, poor sound – just a great big cowpat of a game.



» [Amstrad] A quirky game that played rather well on the Amstrad despite the graphics being ported straight from the Spectrum.

OCTOBER 1988 NEWS



» ET was miffed that Elliott chose the Kuwahara BMX bike over his own personal favourite, the Zike…

13 October finally saw the British government concede defeat in the ongoing battle to keep *Spycatcher*, the controversial book written by former MI5 officer Peter Wright, suppressed.

The book had been banned in England since 1985 after several revelations were made in it. *Spycatcher* was freely available in North America, while an attempt to ban it in Australia came to nothing. In a glaring oversight by the lawyers, the ban in England, having been ruled in an English court, meant that the book was also legal to sell in Scotland. Naturally, the press coverage and the subsequent banning orders meant it was a bestseller, making Peter Wright a millionaire in the process.

On 19 October the UK banned all broadcast interviews with the IRA. The BBC managed to manoeuvre around this by employing voice actors to dub the voices.



» Take some of the biggest names in music and what have you got? Chickenfoot…

27 October saw *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*, Steven Spielberg's 1982 hit movie, finally released on VHS in America, with an amazing 14 million pre-orders.

On 18 October the Traveling Wilburys, a supergroup formed by George Harrison, Tom Petty, Bob Dylan, Roy Orbison and Jeff Lynne, released their first of two studio albums, *Traveling Wilburys Volume 1*.

The iconic yellow pill muncher was back in his maze, eating dots, finding power pills and chasing ghosts, but this time all in the wonderfully visually enhanced world of the third dimension. Pac-Man had also developed a new skill, that of jumping, making it easier to evade death by ghost.

Pac-Mania turned out to be a fun game with nicely detailed, crisp graphics and terrific music courtesy of Ben Daglish on the C64 and Amiga versions. *Pac-Mania* didn't pretend to be something much more grandiose than it was: it was just 3D *Pac-Man* and was all the better for keeping it simple. *Pac-Mania* was released on all the main home computers as well as belatedly on the Master System, Mega Drive and NES months later.

Silverbird proudly declared that it had a whole host of top games being re-released on its label. The tasty talent ready for a budget renaissance included *Dynamite Dan* (Mirrorsoft), *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, and *Cauldron I* and *II* (all Palace Software), with all available for the Amstrad, Spectrum and C64 at £1.99.

There was good news for potential Atari ST buyers and bad news for Commodore: Atari had finally retaliated in the price war between the two companies. Back in June the Amiga had its price slashed by £100 down to £399, making it the same price as the 520STFM. Atari's machine had been as low as £299 early in the year but, due to a rise in the costs of RAM chips, the price rose by £100.

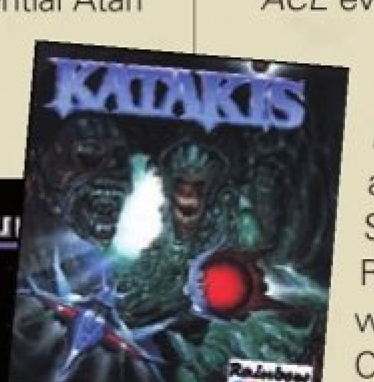
Well, imported chips must have got a whole lot cheaper as Atari reduced the 520STFM machine back down to £299 for the basic setup, with another bundle priced at £399 with a mountain of games.

Coming soon, according to Electronic Arts, was the basketball game *Jordan vs Bird: One On One*, a follow-up to EA's bestselling sporting game ever, *Dr J And Larry Bird Go One On One*, which was released on a multitude of platforms.

Jordan vs Bird would be available on the Commodore 64 and PC, with console versions due for the Game Boy, Mega Drive and NES, and would feature different events, including a slam dunk competition. EA was also releasing another basketball game, *Fast Break*, which would dribble all over *Jordan vs Bird*.

ACE evaluated this month's best games, with *Starglider 2* (Rainbird, Amiga/Atari ST), *Ultima V: Warriors Of Destiny* (Origin/MicroProse, PC) and *Eliminator* (Hewson, Atari ST) attaining the rank of *ACE* Rated, while the near misses were *Netherworld* (Hewson, Commodore 64) and *Super Hang-On* (Electric Dreams, Atari ST).

Computer & Video Games had the usual mammoth array of reviews, with only a handful of Hit awards given to the best of the bunch: *Pool Of Radiance* (US Gold, C64), *Heroes Of The Lance* (US Gold, Atari ST), *Armalyte* (Thalamus, C64) and *Star Ray* (Logotron, Amiga).





» [Commodore 64] Withdrawn for being like *R-Type*, which was good, but *Katakis* was a much better game overall.

THIS MONTH IN…

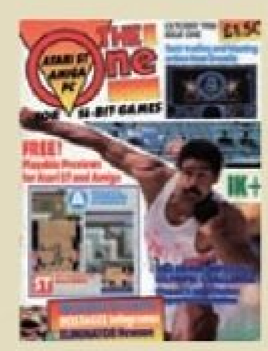
ZZAP!64



The *Katakis*/*R-Type* story continued in *Zzap!64* this month with a full review of the game, with it doing outstandingly well. It received a Sizzler award and glowing endorsements, stating that it was the best *R-Type* variant on the C64. Mediagenic was presumably seething…



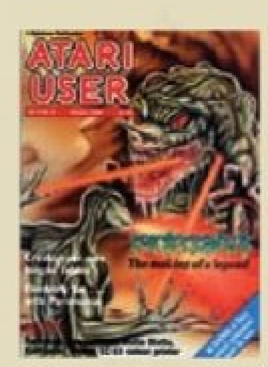
THE ONE



The first issue of EMAP's new magazine covering 16-bit gaming on the Amiga, Atari ST and PC, *The One*, made its debut in newsagents. It lasted for 31 issues before being split into separate Amiga and Atari ST magazine entities. Inside were *Starglider 2* and *Virus*.



ATARI USER



AU previewed *Draconus* by Cognito, a dungeon exploration adventure that programmer Ian Copland described as the "best game ever written for the 8-bit Atari". To be fair, it was a superb offering. Maybe not the best ever, but certainly outstanding.



CHARTS

OCTOBER 1988

ATARI ST



1 Virus (Firebird)
2 Football Manager 2 (Addictive Games)
3 OutRun (US Gold)
4 Gauntlet (US Gold)
5 The Empire Strikes Back (Domark)

COMMODORE 64



1 Football Manager 2 (Addictive Games)
2 Track Suit Manager (Goliath)
3 Salamander (Imagine)
4 Hawkeye (Thalamus)
5 Battleships (Encore)

SPECTRUM



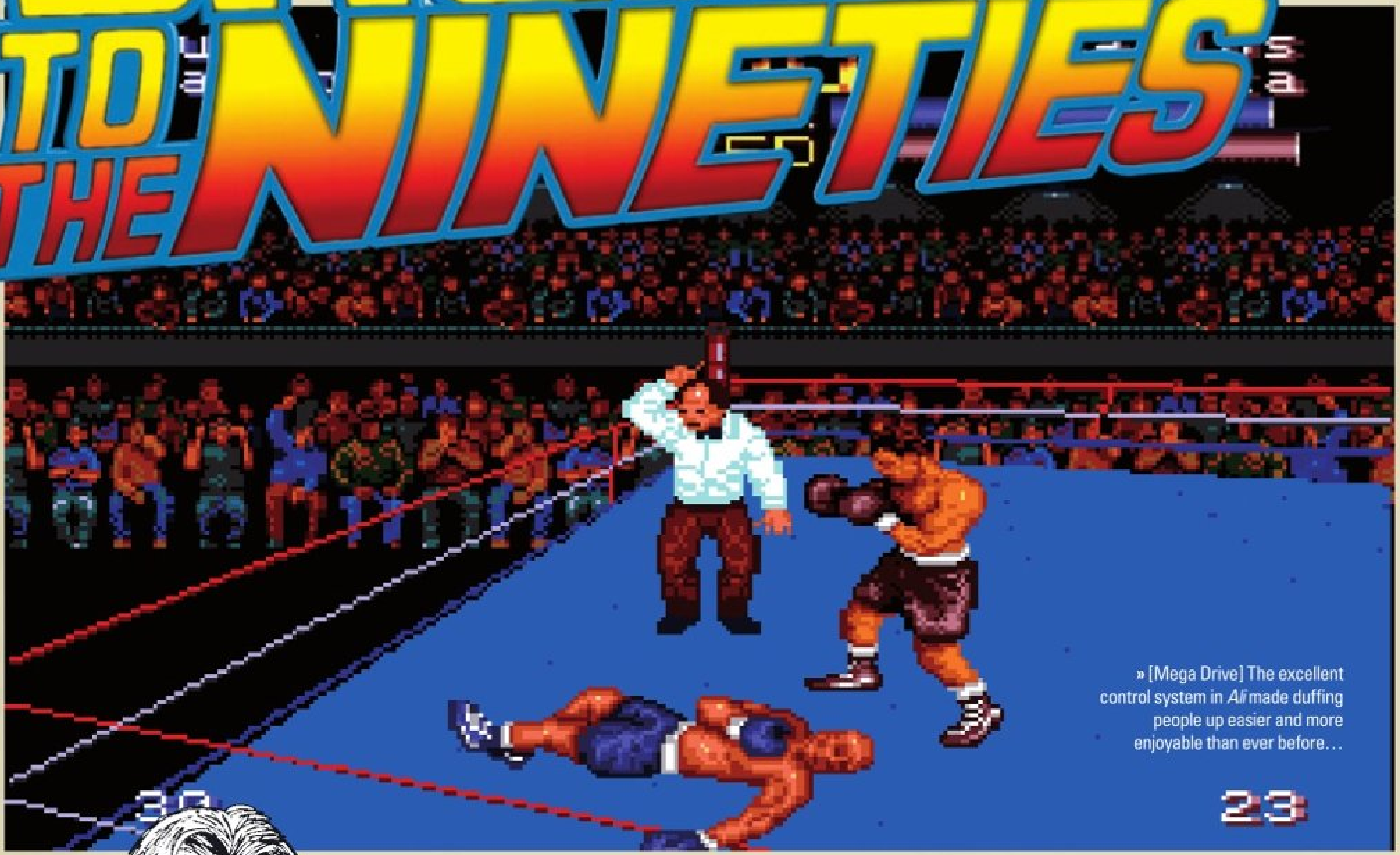
1 Football Manager 2 (Addictive Games)
2 Target Renegade (Imagine)
3 OutRun (US Gold)
4 Dark Side (Incentive)
5 Bionic Commando (Go)

MUSIC

1 One Moment In Time (Whitney Houston)
2 Orinoco Flow (Enya)
3 Desire (U2)
4 Don't Worry Be Happy (Bobby McFerrin)
5 Je Ne Sais Pas Pouquoi? (Kylie Minogue)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] The excellent control system in *Ali* made duffing people up easier and more enjoyable than ever before…

CHARTS



APRIL 1993

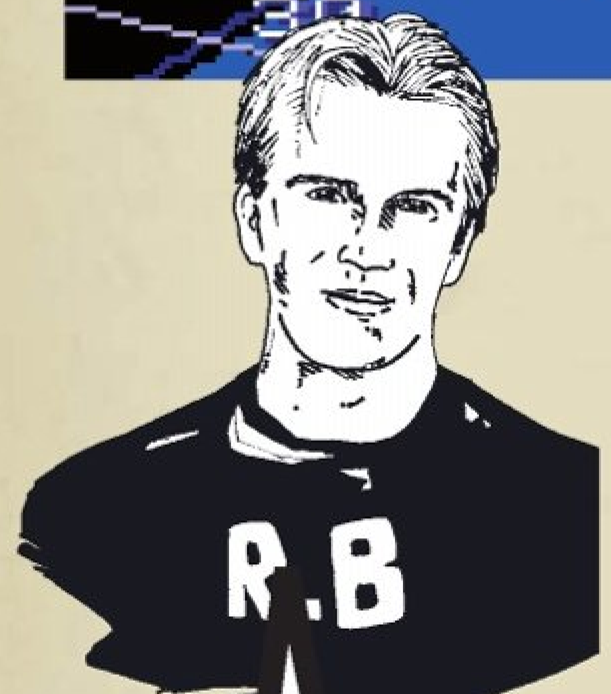
SPECTRUM

1 Trivial Pursuit (Hit Squad)
2 Street Fighter II (US Gold)
3 Crystal Kingdom Dizzy (Codemasters)
4 Pit Fighter (Hit Squad)
5 Football Manager 3 (Prism Leisure)

» [Mega Drive] Despite its corporate links, *Cool Spot* was, as an entertaining and enjoyable game, spot on.







THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1993

APRIL 1993 – SuperDeck not super, Virgin finds the C Spot, Rolling Thunder 3 arrives, Grandslam shows off its Beaver while Ocean plays in Jurassic Park. Richard Burton only wanted a budgie but got an Archaeopteryx

Envisaged to be coming soon to the hole in the top of your Super Nintendo console was the SuperDeck. Developed by Hornby – those of the train sets – the SuperDeck would allow not only NES games but also US and Japanese cartridges to be played on your SNES.

The SuperDeck made it to the prototype stage, even being demonstrated at the London Toy & Hobby Fair, but that final push to retail never quite happened, with the £40 price tag proving too prohibitive.

On the back of last month's news that the Barcode Battler would soon be released in the UK and with sales in Japan of the quirky handheld approaching almost a million units in its first six months on sale, it came as no surprise to find that Nintendo was looking at getting in on the act with the impending launch of the officially endorsed Barcode Boy.

Namco would be releasing the add-on that fitted into the cartridge slot of your Game Boy to bring your barcode warriors to life in a head-to-head battle, so pretty much exactly what the Barcode Battler did. Although a moderate success in Japan, it never reached foreign shores where the whole barcode gaming concept didn't really get going in the first place.

Sega and Codemasters were seemingly heading for an unavoidably bitter and expensive court case, with Sega citing breach of copyright over Codemasters' Mega Drive-compatible cartridge games. Sega suddenly suffered a bout of common sense, pulled out of proceedings and settled out of court, allowing Codemasters to release its first Mega Drive game, the outstanding *Micro Machines*.

Virgin Games announced the release of *Cool Spot* for the Mega Drive, a platform game featuring said Cool Spot, the mascot for the 7UP soft drink, who has to collect spots across several colourful levels, including a crab-infested seaside.

In a similar vein to the game *McDonald Land*, where the multinational corporate connections might well have been enough to put you off from dipping into your wallet, *Cool Spot* also proved to be a great game in its own right, winning over many gamers with its slick gameplay that had the learning curve pitched perfectly. In fact, such was the success of the Mega Drive game, *Cool Spot* was converted to the SNES, Amiga and, later, DOS and Game Boy.

This wasn't Virgin's first foray into the fizzy pop world of game licensing, as it had previously released another 7UP related title, this time just called *Spot*,

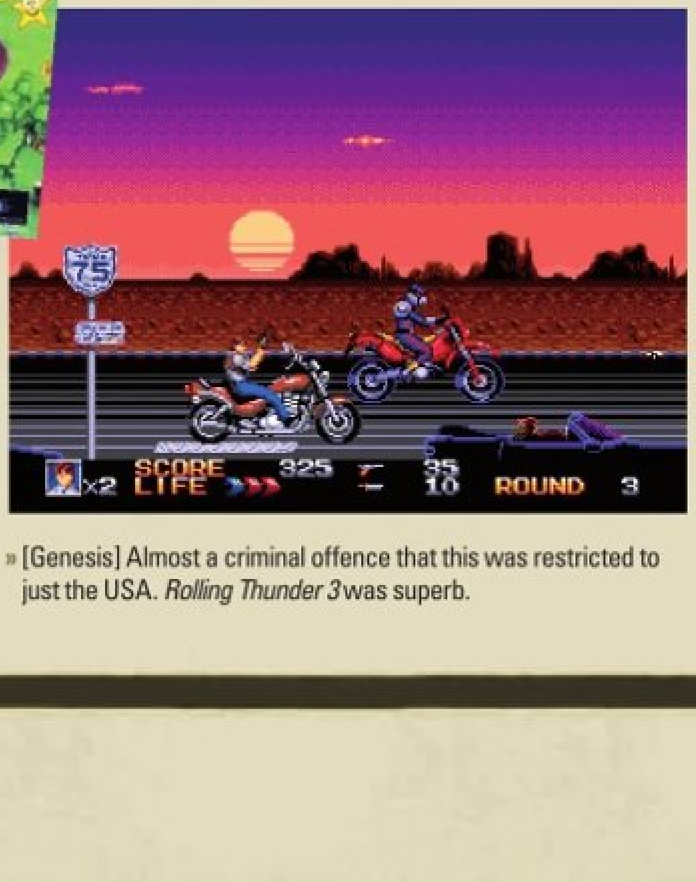


» The SuperDeck – the proposed future of multiformat gaming on the SNES.





» [Amiga] An average game hampered by being a keep-up-with-the-scrolling-screen type of platformer.



» [Genesis] Almost a criminal offence that this was restricted to just the USA. *Rolling Thunder 3* was superb.







MEGA DRIVE

1. Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2. Ecco The Dolphin (Sega)
3. Mickey Mouse: World Of Illusion (Disney)
4. John Madden 93 (Electronic Arts)
5. Super WrestleMania (Flying Edge)

SNES

1. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
2. Bart's Nightmare (Acclaim)
3. Pilotwings (Nintendo)
4. The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past (Nintendo)
5. Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1. Young At Heart (The Bluebells)
2. Informer (Snow)
3. Oh Carolina (Shaggy)
4. Ain't No Love (Ain't No Use) (Sub Sub feat Melanie Williams)
5. When I'm Good And Ready (Sybil)

back in 1991. Once again the Cool Spot character featured, although the game itself was a rather mundane *Othello*-esque four-player puzzler for the Amiga and Atari ST.

Games developer Namco revealed that there was to be a third instalment in the *Rolling Thunder* series, with this episode being a console original rather than an arcade conversion. *Rolling Thunder 3* would be more run-and-gun action, with additional new features including vehicle stages that let you ride on motorbikes and jet skis.

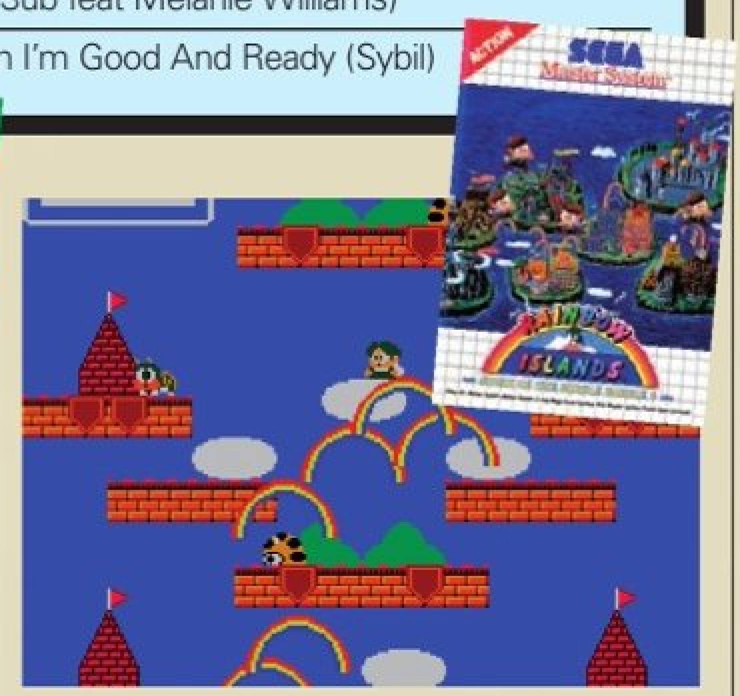
Other nice touches included being able to choose your weapon from a selection of nine at the beginning of each stage, although, once picked, it would be unavailable again; the ability to shoot on the diagonal; and finally an end to those damned annoying *Rolling Thunder* one-bullet deaths, with three energy notches to expend before you shuffled off your mortal coil. It didn't make it any easier, though…

All of this made for one excellent game. What wasn't so excellent was that *Rolling Thunder 3* would never make the jump across the Atlantic, staying as a US-only release on the Sega Genesis.



» [Mega Drive] Is that a huge Shreddie or a Bird's Eye Potato Waffle? It was a tremendously entertaining game either way…

Ocean revealed that its movie tie-in game based on the hugely anticipated cinematic blockbuster *Jurassic Park* would be ready in a month. It was due for an earlier release but was held back due to "unforeseen circumstances". Well, if the eventual Amiga version was anything to go by it was probably undergoing a complete overhaul, as the final game was a huge sprawling mass of wandering, which bored you into a slow and painful submission. A great movie and a great licensing opportunity wasted.



» [Master System] With lashings of cuteness and a kaleidoscope of colour, *Rainbow Islands* was superb.

There was yet more animal-based platform shenanigans brewing, with Mindscape looking to a cock and Grandslam plumping for a spot of beaver. With the seemingly unstoppable wave of cutesy animal platform games increasing on a monthly basis, two more Amiga offerings were looming: *Alfred Chicken* by Mindscape and *Beavers* from Grandslam.

Alfred Chicken started out as a Game Boy title, but success brought further conversions to the Amiga, NES and SNES. Conversely, *Beavers* would remain an Amiga-only title.

With originality thin on the ground with games of this ilk, it came as no surprise to find that both were pleasant enough to play but offered absolutely nothing new in terms of gameplay. Platform freaks would enjoy them; everyone else would barely notice their existence. Out of the two titles, though, the cock beat the beaver by a head.

Super Play reviewed and percentage-rated a swath of games, with the favourites being *Super SWIV* (The Sales Curve), *King Arthur's World* (Jaleco), *Gods* (Mindscape) and *Pro Baseball League 93* (Sony).

In the pages of *Sega Force*, just three Sega Smash awards were doled out from a large reviews section. The trio of gaming excellence were *Streets Of Rage 2* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Rainbow Islands* (Sega, Master System) and *Muhammad Ali Heavyweight Boxing* (Virgin Games, Mega Drive).

Amiga Power cogitated over the Amiga offerings, with its top-rated games being the superb *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* (Psygnosis), *Body Blows* (Team17), *Walker* (Psygnosis), *A-Train* (Ocean) and *Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck* (Core Design).

APRIL 1993 NEWS



April 3 saw chaos reign at the famous Grand National horse race at Aintree, Liverpool. After one false start to the race due to the horses getting tangled in the starting tape, a second false start occurred under the same circumstances, but 30 runners failed to see the race official's red flag and raced on. The result was declared void and the race not rerun.

On 19 April, 77 cult members died including leader David Koresh in an inferno at the headquarters of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. The building had been under observation for several weeks after four FBI agents were killed when they went to arrest Koresh for firearms offences. The fire was started deliberately by the cult once they learnt that the FBI was to raid the building.

24 April saw a huge bomb blast in London. Planted by the IRA, it exploded in the financial district, shattering thousands of panes of glass and causing a church to collapse. The Baltic Exchange was badly hit and had only just been refurbished after a similar IRA bomb blast the previous year. Despite the damage, just one person was killed.

30 April and Monica Seles, women's tennis number one, was stabbed in the back during a match in Germany. The attacker was an obsessive fan of Steffi Graf, who wanted her to regain her top ranking. Game, set and machete…

THIS MONTH IN…

SUPER PLAY



Nintendo was ready to release *Star Fox* on the SNES while the press previewed it to death. Being the first game to utilise the new Super FX chip, the expected revolutionary shoot-'em-up looked to be a promise that Nintendo had fulfilled… and then some.



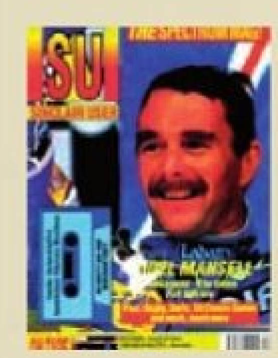
SEGA FORCE



With Amstrad releasing the MegaPC 386X, a combination of a 386 PC and Sega Mega Drive, the review from *Sega Force* applauded the amalgam. But at a price of £999, who was the target audience for the MegaPC? No one seemed to know and it flopped.



SINCLAIR USER



After 134 issues, *Your Sinclair* bid a fond farewell as EMAP decided to pull the plug on the Spectrum magazine that started life way back in the mists of April 1982. With a meagre 36 pages in the final issue, it was the humane thing to do…



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



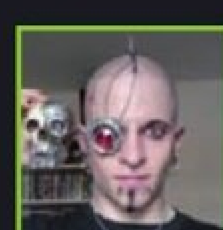
RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: MARK BARTHOLOMEW
» JOINED: 12 APRIL 2010
» LOCATION: LONDON
» OCCUPATION: DATA CO-ORDINATOR
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: AMSTRAD

Myth: History In The Making

HISTORY ACCORDING TO SYSTEM 3

#29



» CPC
» SYSTEM 3
» 1989

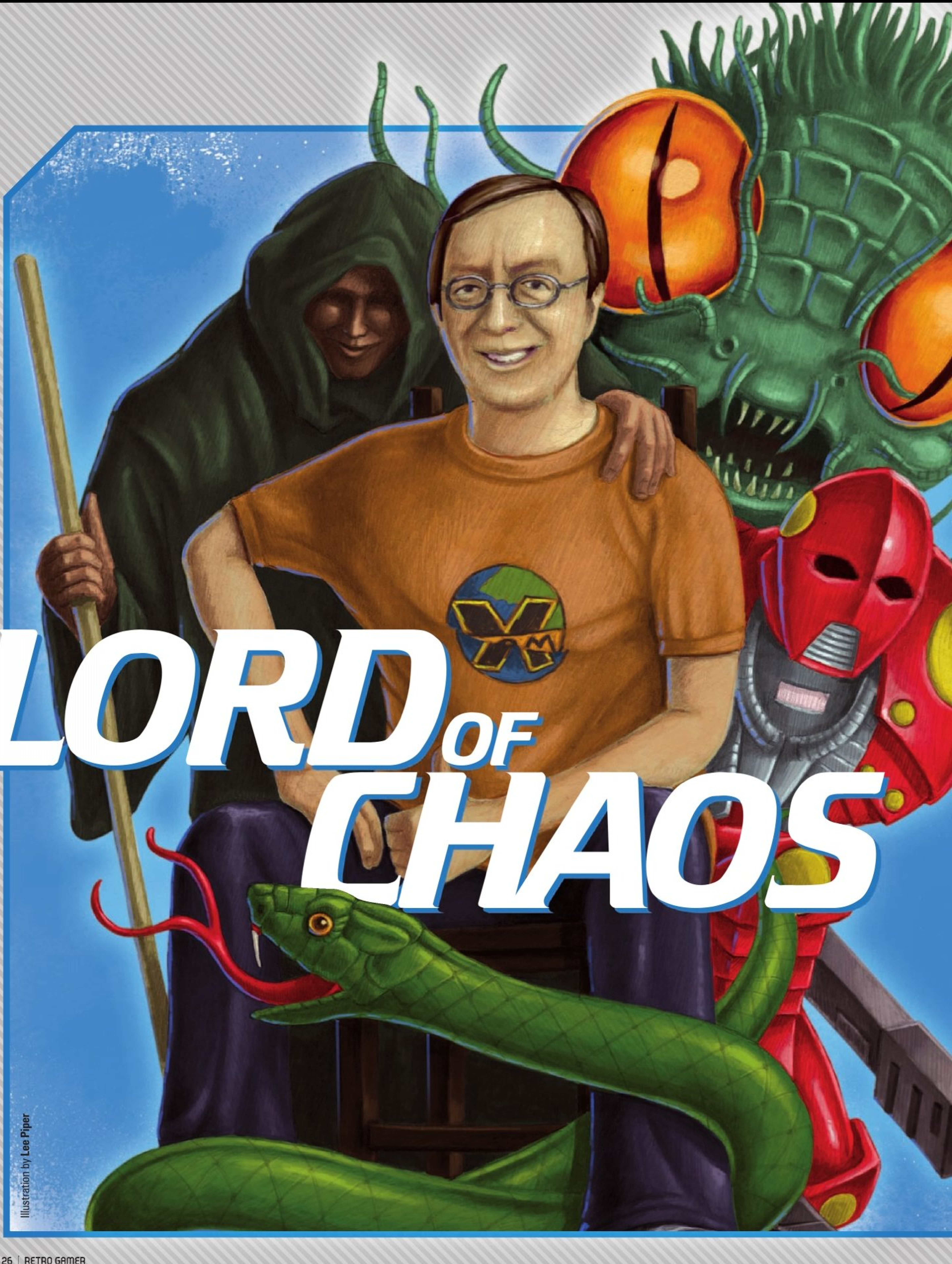
An absolute classic from the varied library of Amstrad software, *Myth* took the player on an exciting journey through various time periods in history and unearthed the legends and myths connected to them. Spanning five huge stages, the game consisted of the player battling hordes of dangerous creatures including Vikings, demons, ghosts and skeletons all while trying to solve the numerous puzzles *and* having to contend with some nasty bosses. These fiends would usually require a certain weapon to make them drop, which were cunningly hidden about the game's platform-based levels. Once defeated, you would need to grab the magical orbs and thus advance to the next stage… not easy!

The classic staples of the adventure game were all present and correct, such as treasure chests containing useful items, numerous weapons to utilise, a sprawling game world and, of course, plenty of devious traps to catch you out and rob you of precious energy. Initially you would become stumped with some of the puzzles, but there were always handy hints lurking throughout the levels, and the game manual offered a few tips too!

Though small, the graphics were superbly animated. A classic case in point was the way the first level's reanimated skeletons would pop out of the ground, look around, and then advance on you with sword and shield ready. Should you have the fireballs handy, they'd explode in a shower of bones, with their skulls becoming a collectible item required to summon a demon. It was these touches that made the game so much fun to play, and I have some very fond memories of battling Medusa and a multi-headed Hydra. And who could forget finally obtaining the Ankh on the Egyptian level and discovering that you could conveniently refill your lives and health bar in the temple?

Sadly, there was no music at all throughout the game, and aside from a few clangs, crashes and explosions, the game remained silent throughout. Ambient perhaps, but a few snatches of themed music wouldn't have gone amiss.

Overall, though, the game was a joy to play, and finally cracking each level with the required amount of orbs, weapons and magical items in tow did help to massage your ego just a tad. Dig this out and experience the *Myth*! ✱



LORD OF CHAOS

Illustration by **Lee Piper**



With a career spanning over 25 years in the industry, Julian Gollop has been the creative force behind a multitude of popular turn-based strategy games, including one of the biggest genre-busting sellers of the Nineties. In an exclusive interview, Mike Bevan catches up with the creator of Laser Squad, X-COM and Chaos

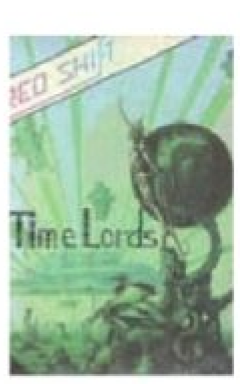
CARVING A NICHE for yourself for any considerable length of time in the videogames industry isn't easy, but Julian Gollop is one notable exception. From humble origins on the BBC Micro, inspired by a love of traditional board and strategy war games, Julian made turn-based strategy accessible and, most importantly, fun, with the likes of Rebelstar, Laser Squad and the massively successful X-COM series. Given the extent of his career, we thought we should start at the beginning…

RETRO GAMER: What would you say were the roots behind your twin passions for board games and computer strategy games?

JULIAN GOLLOP: Largely thanks to my father, I think. Ever since I was a young child we used to play all kinds of games – board games, card games, chess. Actually, we as a whole family played games a lot, especially at Christmas time – we didn't watch many films. Because I liked relatively complex strategy games, when home computers came along I immediately saw them as a very useful medium for playing these kind of games – the kind of games we went on to make.

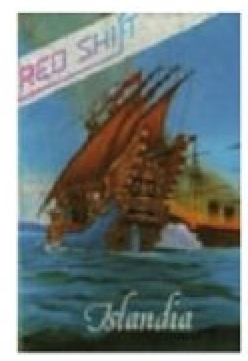
RG: What prompted you to start designing your own games?

JG: As soon as I started playing games I was making them. Around the age of 14 I started getting into more complex games – *Dungeons & Dragons*, SPI board games, Avalon Hill… a lot of stuff. From then on I developed a big interest in strategy games.



TIME LORDS (1983) BBC Micro

Julian's debut game *Time Lords* was published by London-based strategy computer game specialist Red Shift; the company would also release his three subsequent titles. It's an interesting concept, shall we say 'borrowed' from a certain scarf-wearing BBC sci-fi hero, where players have the ability to move through a number of time zones across five planets, altering the outcome of wars and battling up to four human-controlled opponents.



ISLANDIA (1984) BBC Micro

Islandia is a naval-themed strategy game for up to four players, with *Risk*-style leanings. Players take turns sailing warships between several islands, and capturing them gives access to various resources that can be used to improve their fleet. Naval units have a specific movement range per turn, so the title can be considered the first to include the concept of AP (action points), later to become an integral feature of Julian's games.

RG: You devised *Time Lords* and *Islandia* while you were still at school. How did the publishing deal with Red Shift come about, and what do you remember about creating those two titles?

JG: I got involved through a friend of mine, who was involved in a group of war-gamers in Harlow. Red Shift was set up by a guy who was a miniatures war-gamer to create computer games. *Time Lords* and *Islandia* were programmed by a school friend of mine, Andy Greene, who later on worked with us at Mythos Games. He had a BBC Micro, I had nothing apart from some game designs, so we combined the two

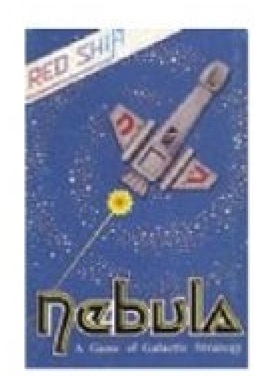
Time Lords started out as a pen-and-paper game. You had to generate the universe using dice, and it required a game master to run the game. It was clearly really designed for a computer game naturally, so that was my first computer game design, I guess. For *Islandia* I wanted to do a game with some very basic resource management economics and, for some reason, naval combat. I had the idea of randomly generating a map with islands, apart from the central island where the four players start.

RG: It must have been pretty exciting for you. How did they do sales-wise? Though we're guessing you probably didn't see huge piles of royalties come flooding your way…

JG: It was a tiny amount, actually. Not being too business-savvy at that stage, the owner of the company took most of the money, of course. I didn't really know how well they were selling relative to other games; there weren't any sales charts that I knew about at the time. I don't think I ever saw them on sale in any shops. We sold them at various computer shows and mail order, and I guess some were sold through distribution channels to various independent shops. I was pretty excited when they were published – when we actually had a physical product printed with the instruction manual, and the cassette tapes were manufactured.

RG: So where did the idea of action points, which we first see in *Islandia*, and an important feature of most of your subsequent games, come from? Does the concept derive directly from strategy board games?

JG: Yes, from board games. Many of the SPI games used concepts like this. They had fairly sophisticated things like simultaneous movement and trying to simulate the cost of different actions. They didn't really work well as board games. In fact, they would have worked better as computer games.

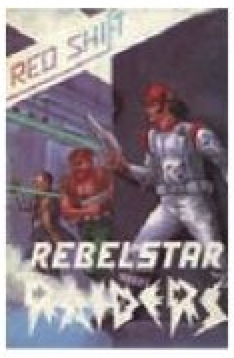


NEBULA (1984) ZX Spectrum

Julian's debut on the Spectrum was his first experience of coding a commercial game by himself. A self-styled 'game of galactic conquest', it's the first of his titles to feature a computer-controlled opponent. Alternatively, up to five human players can take on the role of a unique alien race and expand their civilisations through the various planets of a distinctive spiral-shaped galaxy.

RG: How did you get into programming games yourself?

JG: I bought a ZX81 from a friend at school for £25 and started to learn programming. I was quite amazed by it, in fact. I could really appreciate the power of these machines, even though it was a ZX81 with 1K of memory, chunky characters and no graphics processing to speak of. I then bought a ZX Spectrum and started programming *Nebula*. It wasn't a bad little game, I programmed it relatively quickly in BASIC, and it did pretty well.



REBELSTAR RAIDERS (1984) *ZX Spectrum*

The game that introduced the familiar turn-based squad strategy of Julian's later work. *Rebelstar Raiders* was also written in BASIC, but still manages to be an absorbing, tactically interesting game. Featuring three single-screen scenarios sporting graphic environments resembling detailed *Star Trek* ship schematics, it's a fun two-player experience, whether playing the defenders or the infiltrating 'raiders' faction of the title.

RG: You were obviously quite a sci-fi fan from an early age. *Time Lords* is clearly influenced by *Doctor Who*, and do we detect a bit of a *Star Wars* vibe with *Rebelstar Raiders*?

JG: I can't deny a certain influence, it's true. But still, I would probably say that the main influence was some of the science-fiction board games I'd played. Game Designers Workshop had a game called *Snapshot*. Even though I'd never actually played the game, I did read the rules. I think that game had the concept of 'snap-shots' and 'aimed shots', which is a concept I used in subsequent games, of course. *Rebelstar Raiders* turned out to be very popular with friends and people who had bought it, despite being just a two-player game.

RG: At what point did you decide that you wanted to pursue game design as a full-time profession?

*TACTICS PAST

Besides Julian Gollop's impressive back catalogue, there have been plenty of decent squad-based tactical titles of merit over the years. Here are a few others we'd consider worth investigating

SABRE TEAM (1994) PC/AMIGA



PERHAPS THE ONLY serious contender in rivalling *UFO: Enemy Unknown* at the time, Krisalis Software's squad-based tactical title was a minor hit on the Amiga, but largely ignored on the PC. A shame, as it's a thrilling effort, where players command an elite SAS unit attempting to rescue hostages from terrorists in a besieged American embassy.

TACTICS OGRE (1995) SUPER FAMICOM



GIVEN THAT IT laid the foundations for Square's *Final Fantasy Tactics*, this is arguably the quintessential Japanese tactical RPG. Although never released outside Japan on its debut hardware, the game was later released by Atlus in the US on the PlayStation, and this is the version we'd recommend – if you can avoid the crazy eBay prices.

INCUBATION: TIME IS RUNNING OUT (1997) PC



THE FOURTH INSTALMENT in Blue Byte's *Battle Isle* series features a similar theme to *X-COM*, although in tone it's definitely more Ridley Scott than Gerry Anderson. This was one of the first fully 3D squad-based tactical titles, so the game engine isn't perfect, but it's a good, fast-paced combat game that *X-COM* fans should enjoy.

VANDAL HEARTS (1997) PLAYSTATION



DESCRIBED BY JULIAN himself as "the kind of game I would have liked to have done if I'd had the chance" *Vandal Hearts* is a must-play for fans of the genre. Although it lacks the depth of later titles, it more than compensates with its excellent storyline, characters and soundtrack, and a playtime that doesn't outstay its welcome.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS (1998) PLAYSTATION



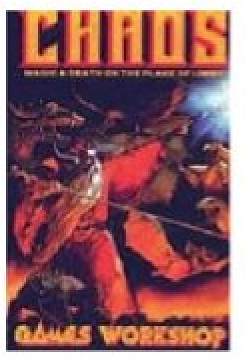
THIS MASSIVE TACTICAL RPG, directed by *Tactics Ogre* alumnus Yasumi Matsuno, was the first venture into the genre for Square's franchise. The game's main strength is a remarkable scope for unit customisation via the innovative 'job' system. For an alternative, futuristic take on the genre from Square, also try the *Front Mission* series.

FIRE EMBLEM (2003) GAME BOY ADVANCE



ANOTHER OF JULIAN'S favourites, this was the first entry in the long-running Japanese tactical RPG franchise to receive a Western release. Rather than the isometric perspective of many other recent 'tactics' games, it uses a view system similar to *Advance Wars*, allowing for larger, scrolling map environments and some seriously epic battles.

JG: Immediately after I left school, I think, or at least in my final year. Once I'd got my hands on a ZX81 I realised this was the future and never looked back, apart from a minor diversion at college. Although I didn't do a lot of studying, I managed to complete two computer games while I was at college: *Chaos* and *Rebelstar*.



CHAOS (1985) ZX Spectrum

One of Julian's most enduring Spectrum titles, *Chaos* features an abstract multiplayer arena where rival necromancers fight to the last man standing in a battle of wizardry and wits. With a staggering array of spells with which to do combat, from gooey blobs to golden dragons and defensive walls, it's a remarkably complex and nuanced game for its period, and one that lives on via the indie remake scene, with the likes of the excellent *Chaos Funk*.

RG: What were the inspirations behind *Chaos*?

JG: *Chaos* was actually based on a board game I made in 1982, inspired by a game by Games Workshop called *Warlock*, which I remember some kids at school playing, although they wouldn't ever let me play it. So I thought, 'Screw them, I'll make my own magic game and it'll be better than their game anyway!' So I made this board game in 1982, and a preliminary version was programmed by Andy Greene on the BBC B. Then I decided to do an adaptation for the ZX Spectrum. It still had a lot in common with the board game, although it had some new elements – the idea of casting creatures as illusions, for example. In a way, *Chaos* is one of my favourites of all the games I've ever made. I'm not quite sure why, but it was a good, fast-playing, fun game; you could play with up to eight human players or a mixture of human and computer opponents; and it was certainly chaotic with that many people! But yes, I liked the game a lot when I was making it and playing it.

RG: What do you remember about working with Games Workshop?

JG: I wasn't the one involved in directly negotiating with them; it was mostly former Red Shift guys who had decided to do some games for Games Workshop. We actually did some adaptations of some of their board games including *Battlecars*, which I programmed the car designer for, and *Talisman*, which was done by another colleague of mine. *Chaos* was an original game, of course, although I don't think I ever told them it was inspired by *Warlock*. I think they pulled out of publishing computer games after a short while, although at one point they did want me to do a game based on their *Judge Dredd* board game. I wanted to do a strategy game where you controlled a squad of judges and sent them to crimes, with a tactical combat sequence where you dealt with the perps, but they didn't like it, and opted for some sideways-scrolling platform game with Judge Dredd on his bike, which was awful.

RG: Why do you think *Chaos* was so appealing to players?

JG: It has an interesting balance of randomness and strategy. You don't know what spells your opponents have, there's a certain amount of randomness in whether you can cast a certain spell or not, and at the same time you've got to think tactically depending on what spells you've got and what you've managed to cast. You could say it's a nice blend of tactics and chaos… I get a number of requests each year from people wanting to do a remake of *Chaos*, and I say, 'Yeah, go ahead. Not a problem.'



REBELSTAR (1986) ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC

Building on the success of *Rebelstar Raiders*, Julian reworked his sci-fi squad-based hit here with much larger, scrolling scenarios and greater strategic depth. New mechanics include the first appearance of 'snap shots' and 'aimed shots', RPG-esque stats for squad members such as morale and stamina, and far more interactivity with its environments. *Rebelstar* was Julian's first *Crash* Smash, receiving an admirable overall score of 93%.



REBELSTAR 2: ALIEN ENCOUNTER (1988) ZX Spectrum

Another Smash award-winning game, *Rebelstar 2* owes a certain amount of its inspiration to the *Alien* films, as the raiders land on the planet Thray 6 to eradicate the acid-spitting species that's threatening their homeworld. *Rebelstar* and *Rebelstar 2* were published on the Firebird/Silverbird budget labels and cost a mere £1.99 each, representing staggeringly good value for money in anyone's book.



» [C64] Battling a giant spider summoned by your wizard nemesis in *Lords Of Chaos*.



» [Atari ST] *Lords Of Chaos* featured a staggering variety of abilities and spell options for players to experiment with.

> "Once I'd got my hands on a ZX81 I realised this was the future and never looked back"

RG: After *Chaos* you created *Rebelstar* and *Rebelstar 2* for Firebird, which updated the turn-based tactical scenarios seen in *Rebelstar Raiders*. What do you remember about creating it?

JG: I did *Rebelstar* at college, entirely on my own. Again, it was originally just a two-player game. I took it to Telecomsoft, because they had an office in New Oxford Street, very close to where I was living in Islington. They liked it, but they said they wanted single-player, so I went back and spent a few weeks working on the single-player version. I had no idea how to do it: I had to invent a path-finding algorithm and I knew nothing about such things, so I had to come up with something from scratch. But it works. You had the single-player version on one side of the tape and the two-player version on the other side. They published it, and it sold pretty well, even though they decided to put it on their Firebird label – I was hoping they were going to put it on their more expensive label. The royalty was a pittance – I think I got ten pence a copy – but it sold tens of thousands. I can't remember the exact figures, but it did sell a lot. I bought a nice shiny red guitar and dotted around for a bit spending some money, so yeah, it was cool.

RG: How did you find the jump between programming relatively simple single-screen titles in BASIC (*Nebula* and *Rebelstar Raiders*) and the more complex, multi-scrolling *Rebelstar* games in assembly language?

JG: Pretty natural really. I didn't have too much of a problem with it. *Chaos* was the first assembly language game I did and *Rebelstar* was the second. Although I do remember debugging was something of an involved process: I often had to print out the Spectrum source code on long rolls of printer paper and go through the code line by line, which was a very reliable

★ FACTS AND FIGURES

Julian's debut squad-based strategy game, ***Rebelstar Raiders***, pre-dates the first turn-based tactical console title – Nintendo's *Fire Emblem* – by six years.

The original version of ***Time Lords*** featured alien races labelled Daleks, Autons, Zarbi and Cybermen. A second release altered the names to Kaled, Nestine, Zarby and Cyburmen…

A poll in the final issue of *Your Sinclair* rated ***Chaos*** the fifth best Spectrum game of all time, ahead of *Manic Miner* and *Elite*. In 2006 **games™** put *Chaos* at number 44 in its all-time top 100 games, the highest-rated Spectrum game after *Manic Miner*.

Mythos Games used the Uffington White Horse, a famous prehistoric hill-carving, as its logo.

UFO: Enemy Unknown went on to ship over a million units worldwide, an incredible feat for a turn-based strategy game.

The tutorial to 2002's ***Rebelstar: Tactical Command*** features an instructor named Corporal Jonlan – a nod to the hero of *Laser Squad*.

method, by the way. I was relying on dual microdrives with a small set of microdrive cartridges, which I have to say proved 100 per cent reliable through the whole development. Amazing, really.

RG: The *Rebelstar* games were your first foray into the 'squad-based tactics' genre in which you later made a big name for yourself. What attracted you to making them, and why do you think you continued to be interested in producing this style of game through to *X-COM* and *Laser Squad Nemesis*?

JG: Again, it goes back to board game roots. One I was playing called *Sniper* stands out as being quite influential. Also some miniatures games we were playing in our games group in Harlow were actually closer to *Rebelstar Raiders* and *Rebelstar*. The tactical decisions in the game, like whether to use a quick snap shot or higher AP aimed shot are interesting, as they require the player to make decisions which sometimes might be obvious, or sometimes might be a fine balance between risk and reward.

> "I got a pittance on Rebelstar – 10p a copy – but it sold tens of thousands"



LASER SQUAD (1988) ZX Spectrum/C64/Various

Arguably the most influential of Julian's games, *Laser Squad* was certainly his most polished and accomplished title up to this point, and a culmination of the work that had gone before with the *Rebelstar* trilogy. The stylish visuals, improved weapon inventory system and impressive combat AI were all hints of what was to come in *X-COM*, and the game was universally praised by the press across its many platforms.

RG: *Laser Squad* is generally seen as your 'classic' 8-bit era squad tactics game. What improvements or changes did you try to make to the already successful *Rebelstar* formula for that game?

JG: One of the main things was to create a scenario-based system where we had multiple scenarios because we wanted to release expansion kits to add some configurations to your squad, so you got to choose weapons and arms before going into battle, improve the AI, and have something of a continuous story. We introduced a line-of-sight system in *Laser Squad*, so you had hidden movement of the enemies, according to line-of-sight rules, which *Rebelstar* didn't have. It was a number of innovations, really. I was keen on innovating and exploring the basic turn-based tactical combat system.

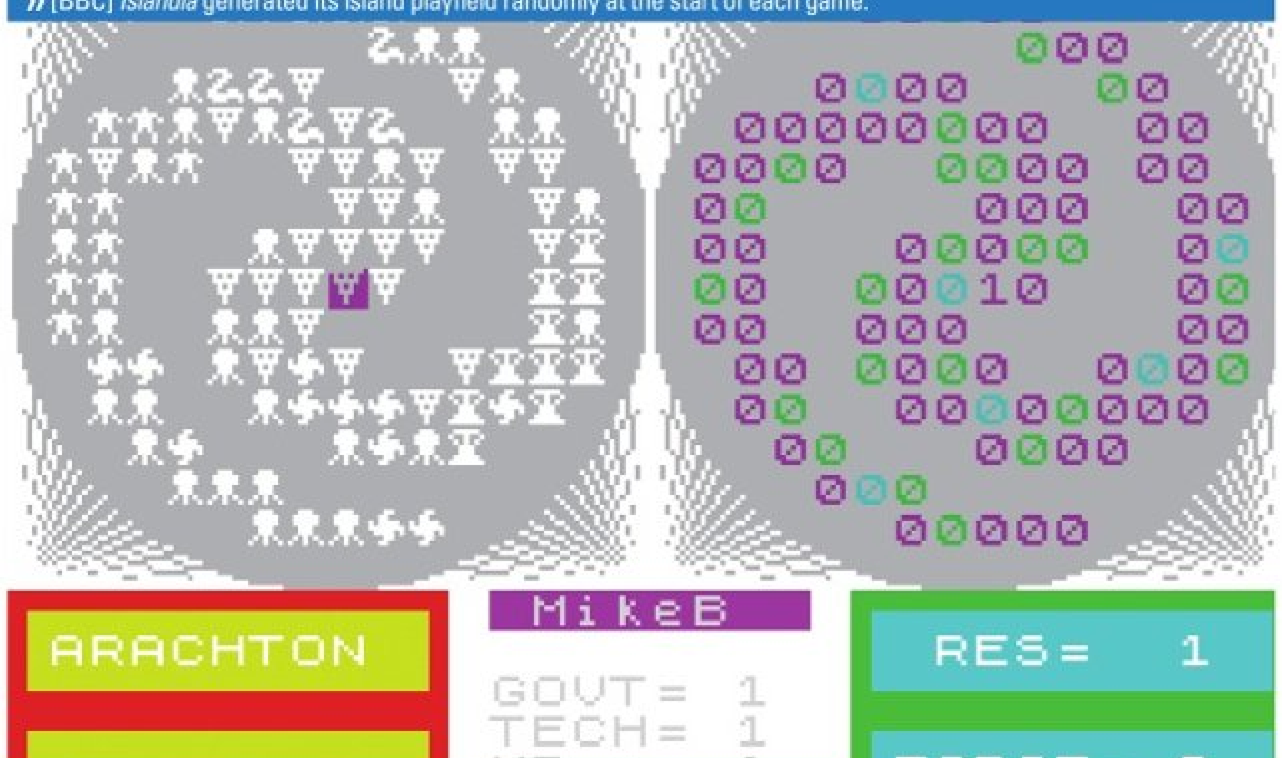
My brother Nick joined me at this point, and we set up Target Games. We did so many versions of this game

» [Spectrum] Corporal Jonlan infiltrates the Omni Corporation moon base in *Laser Squad*.





» [BBC] *Islandia* generated its island playfield randomly at the start of each game.

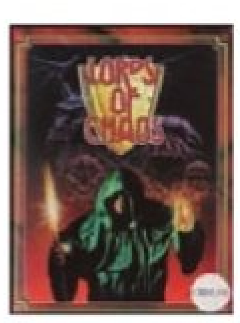


» [Spectrum] *Nebula* had a split-screen configuration.

– Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC. We did separate disk-based versions of all these, and there was a PC version by Krisalis Software, who also did the Amiga version. So it was a major step up, I guess. I got most of the Spectrum version done and Nick was working on the Commodore 64 version – the Amstrad version used the Spectrum code because it was the same processor, of course. The Commodore 64 version was a bit trickier because the hardware was a lot more complicated.

RG: Your games always seemed to achieve a level of critical acclaim in publications like *Crash* and *Sinclair User* that must have pleased you at the time. Was the critical response satisfying or a good source of motivation to create better and more complex games?

JG: It was very inspiring, I guess because I was doing stuff nobody else was really doing, which helped. I was making games I wanted to play. It was important to me that the games would be something I would be actually interested in playing at the end of making them, so I was pleased that other people liked the games as well. You could say I was pleasantly surprised.



LORDS OF CHAOS (1990) ZX Spectrum/C64/Various

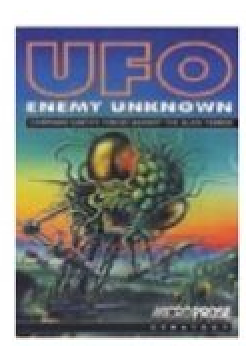
An unlikely hybrid of *Laser Squad* and *Chaos*, and the first release by the Gollop brothers' Mythos Games, *Lords Of Chaos* takes those warring wizards and massive spell inventories and plonks them in an expansive, RPG-style turn-based setting. To say this is a sophisticated game for its time is something of an understatement, but the lack of immediate accessibility means this cult classic might be best appreciated by fans of the original *Chaos*.

RG: *Lords Of Chaos* was possibly your most complex game up until that point, from a design point of view. How did you set about updating the core ideas behind *Chaos* for this game?

JG: I'd set up Target Games with a friend of mine. He left, so me and Nick decided we would create a new name for the company – Mythos Games. It was just the two of us, so I was still programming and designing, of course. *Lords Of Chaos* was a bit more role-playing oriented – you had a sort of wizard creator and you chose spell levels and basic characteristics. The idea was as you played through the mission scenarios you gained experience points and improved your character. The problem with *Lords Of Chaos* was that it was a much slower, more time-consuming game compared to *Chaos*, so the immediate fun factor was a little bit lost. It was better as a single-player game. We actually created maps that could be multiplayer and specific missions that were single-player only, which had much more puzzle-like elements to them.

It had some neat ideas: you could buff up your creatures with potions to increase their attack, defence and speed, and there were other useful ones like invisibility potions, for example. You could have creatures riding other creatures, such as horses and gryphons, and had flying creatures and ground-based ones. Each spell had eight levels so a level one spell would summon one creature, but if you had a level eight gold dragon spell you could summon up eight gold dragons and your opponent would probably be quaking in their boots! Although having said that, the mana cost would probably have been prohibitively expensive…

As a multiplayer game it probably didn't work so well. Because of the hidden movement system, you weren't supposed to see what the other players were doing. I remember playing four-player games of *Lords Of Chaos*… it took hours. You had to be very patient.



UFO: Enemy Unknown (1994) PC/Amiga/PlayStation

The most famous of Julian's projects outside the UK, *UFO: Enemy Unknown* is a must-play classic of the genre. Marrying squad-based combat with a detailed strategic overworld, the game sees players taking on the role of the X-COM organisation, tracking alien craft via an impressive 3D global scanner, developing bases of operation and researching captured alien technology to harness against a mysterious and growing extraterrestrial threat.

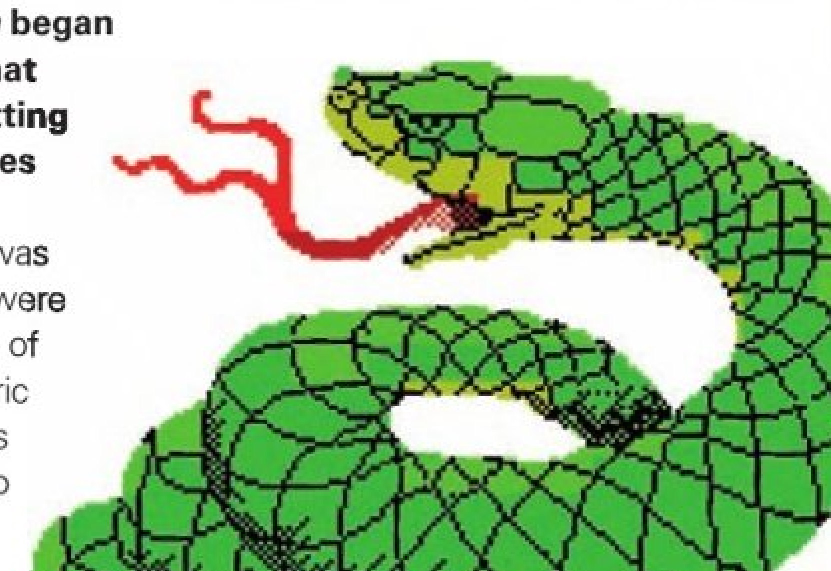
RG: *UFO: Enemy Unknown* began life as *Laser Squad 2*, so what prompted the change in setting and what were the influences behind it?

JG: Well, at the beginning it was still just Nick and myself. We were working on a very basic demo of *Laser Squad 2* – it had isometric graphics and the environments were correctly 3D modelled so your shots could go up and down, or left and right. But it was still just a two-player tactical combat system. We decided once we had this demo that we needed to find a better publisher. We had a few candidates: one was Domark, another was MicroProse. MicroProse was the company we really wanted to publish the game, because of *Civilization* and *Railroad Tycoon* – to us they were really the premier publisher of strategy games in the world at the time.

We took the demo to MicroProse in Chipping Sodbury, and showed it to a guy called Pete Moreland [MicroProse's head of development]. He showed it to a bunch of other people there – fortunately enough people at MicroProse were familiar with *Laser Squad* – and Pete came back and said to me and Nick that he liked it, but he wanted a 'bigger' game. I had to ask him exactly what he meant, and it turned out he wanted something a bit more epic in terms of scale and scope, like *Civilization*, rather than just short tactical skirmishes.

I thought, well, yes we could do that. In fact it was a very good idea. He even suggested the theme of UFOs. I went away and thought about it, did some research on UFOs, and the more I looked at it the more I thought this was cool. I remember going out and buying a video tape of the old Gerry Anderson *UFO* TV series, and the thing that inspired me from that was the idea of having a worldwide organisation that was set up to stop this alien menace. But I wanted it to be a bit more firmly rooted in UFO mythology. The other thing that was influential was a book by Bob Lazar, where he describes his experience of working on recovered UFOs in Area 51, and how the US government were allegedly trying to reverse-engineer captured flying saucer technology. That, of course, was a major influence on the whole cycle of shooting down UFOs, investigating crash sites and capturing alien technology in *X-COM*.

Pete liked our ideas, so we did a very rough design document – about 12 pages long, which was the longest I'd ever done at the time – and started





work on the project. Nick and I were doing the design and programming, and we had two artists assigned from MicroProse working on the game, so basically it was just four of us. John Broomhall did the music for us, in the last two months.

RG: And, of course, the game was your big break into the profitable PC market…

JG: It was a much bigger project than we had done before in terms of scope and ambition. It was seriously ambitious. We knew we had to move onto the PC, particularly for the American market. I remember MicroProse asked us if we could program PC games, and we replied, 'Yes, of course,' even though we'd never actually programmed anything on the PC at that point! The actual demo of *Laser Squad 2* was done on the Atari ST; believe it or not, we had originally programmed *Lords Of Chaos* on the ST as well – we'd given up, of course, on the 8-bit machines at this stage. But the PC was the main games platform in the US, and it was becoming that way in most of Europe, so we clearly wanted to develop for it. We also programmed an Amiga version; Nick did the conversion, but it was quite tough because the Amiga wasn't quite as fast as PCs were becoming at that time.

RG: *UFO: Enemy Unknown* was far and away your biggest selling title. Did its popularity surprise you?

JG: Well yes, it was phenomenally successful, and my career has gone downhill ever since! [laughs] I'm still staggered at the number of people who have played this game. When I moved to Bulgaria a few years ago I was astounded – most colleagues have played it, and I get endless requests from Russian magazines for interviews, so it was hugely popular in Russia, even though I probably never saw any royalties from these countries! And, of course, it was very popular in the US.

RG: Why do you think it proved to be so popular with the games-playing public?

JG: There were some fortunate coincidences. The first series of *The X-Files* had aired in America in '94, just before the game had released. PC strategy games were quite a significant genre in those days, and I suppose the game as a whole had this expansive scope to it – we had this interplay between strategic and tactical missions. Although the tactical missions are pseudo-randomly generated, it did fulfil the objective we'd been given, which was to make a 'big' game. When you look at some of its parts they don't seem to add up to much, but when you put it all together it creates a very interesting multi-level game where what you do at the micro level has an impact at the strategic level, and in turn at the tactical level. So when you're on tactical missions you are thinking about which aliens or weapons you can get for research, and on a strategic level you are thinking about fighting terror sites in one part of the world and maintaining relationships with governments in others. For me it's almost like an ideal game design in that sense.

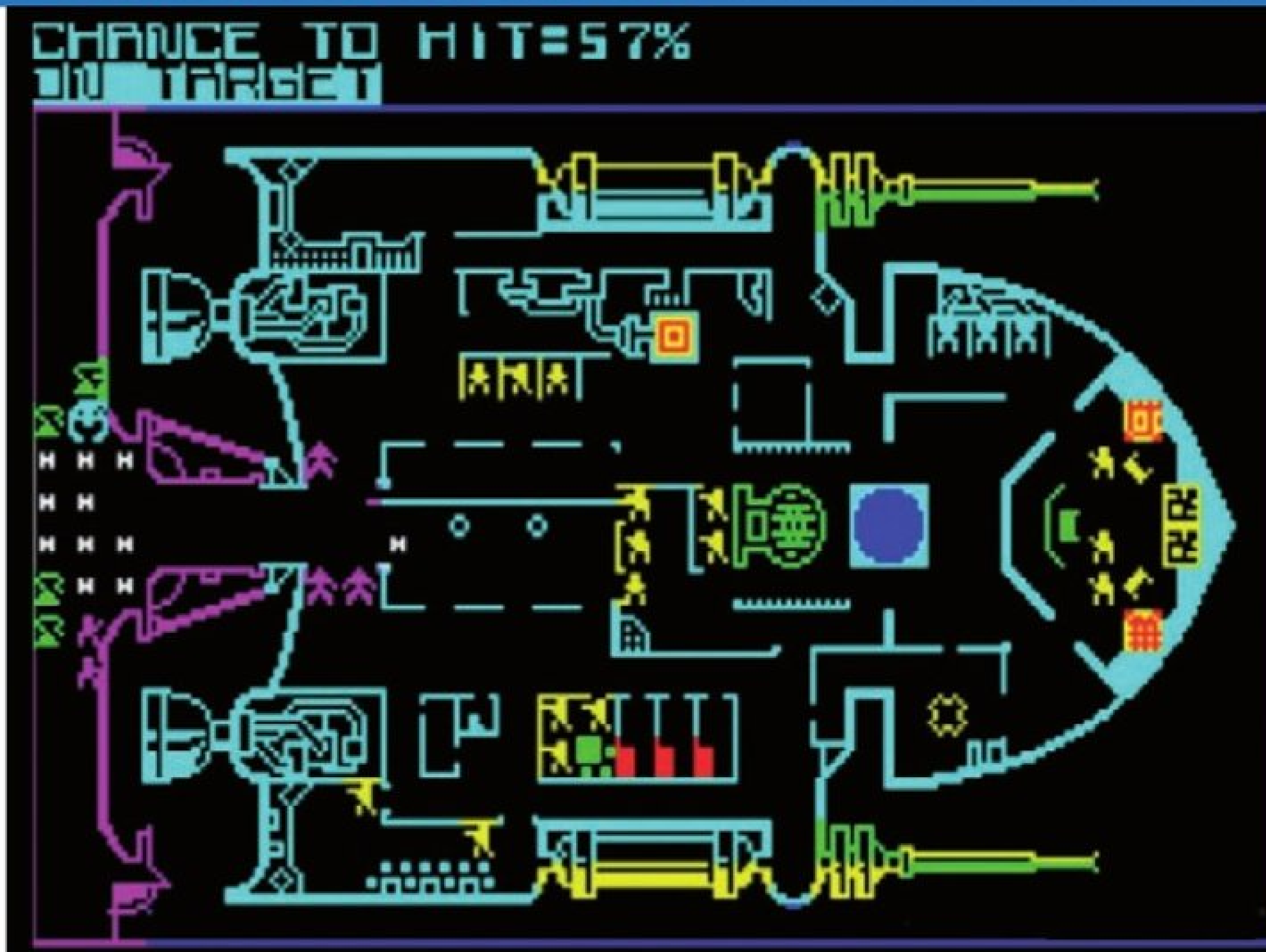
In some respects we were forced down that route because we simply couldn't create a vast amount of content with just a handful of people, so we had to leverage what we could out of the game system. As a MicroProse game I think it fit quite well into their catalogue at the time.



X-COM: Terror From The Deep (1995) PC/Amiga/PlayStation

Despite being the direct sequel to *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, this title features very little of Julian's direct involvement, as he reveals. It's an interesting curio, however, for fans, turning the original UFO theme on its head with an even more far-fetched underwater premise. We suspect that MicroProse's in-house development team had been watching too much of *The Abyss*…

RG: Were you satisfied with *X-COM: Terror From The Deep* given that MicroProse gave you



» [Spectrum] The blueprint-style layout of the Starlingale, one of three scenarios from *Rebelstar Raiders*.

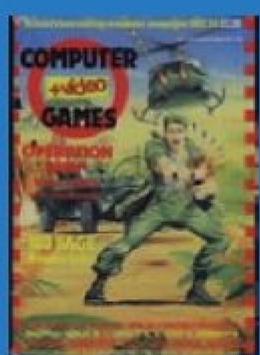


» [Spectrum] *Rebelstar 2*: The raiders' attempts to reach the alien fortress are hampered by watery stuff and swamp rats…

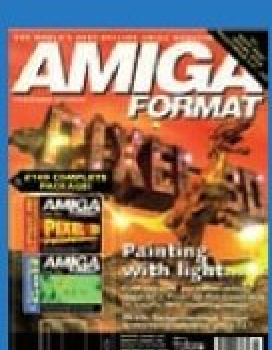


» [Spectrum] With eight duelling wizards, each summoning an array of mythical creatures, *Chaos* lived up to its name.

*GOOD PRESS /BAD PRESS



"Aside from the naff packaging, *Laser Squad* is one of the best games I have ever played. It's a one or two-player tactical warfare simulation with great graphics, sound, playability and hookability to boot. One-player it's great, two-player it's unbeatable." **Tony Dillon, Computer & Video Games (97% Overall)**

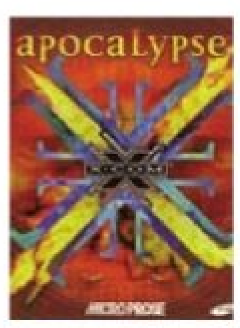


"Because of the sheer […] choice of games on the Amiga market you never really go back to them for a play unless […] a game is exceptionally good. *UFO: Enemy Unknown* is one I'll go back to again and again." **Steve McGill, Amiga Format (90% Overall)**

"The marriage of *X-COM: Apocalypse* to your computer might not be the stuff of silver wedding anniversaries. Certainly, folks in attendance may find themselves less enamoured if they've already played its older brother. Truth be told, it even makes a lousy one night stand." **Computer Games Magazine**

such a short development period to create a sequel?

JG: Well, they dragged their heels about it for some bizarre reason, I don't know why. Eventually they agreed to do a sequel, and they wanted us to do it in six months. We said, 'Well, we can't really do anything meaningful in six months except just do new graphics and locations for the existing game.' They were quite insistent about it so we said, 'Okay, why don't you take our code and do the sequel in six months, and we'll work on the third game and spend longer about it.' So we actually didn't have much involvement at all with the first sequel. Needless to say they took 12 months instead of six, even though their team size was massive compared to ours. I didn't really play it that much, to be honest. The graphics were quite impressive, but I think they made a mistake trying to expand the scope of the game by making the missions bigger and longer.



X-COM: Apocalypse (1997) PC

Apocalypse was an interesting, if not wholly successful, experiment in re-inventing the *X-COM* formula for developer Mythos. In this instalment the overworld is reduced to a single city, Mega-Primus, which players must strive to protect from an alien menace. Controversially for fans, it includes a real-time combat engine alongside its traditional turn-based system, the first such instance in any of Julian's games.

RG: *X-COM: Apocalypse* marked the last time you had personal involvement with the series. Why did you decide to go for a *SimCity*-style environment over the world map of the previous games?

JG: Basically we didn't really want to do another *X-COM* game at the time, because after three years working on the game we wanted to do something different, which was, of course, very silly of us because we should have really capitalised on what we had. The original idea for *Apocalypse* was somewhat going back to the *Judge Dredd* concept I had many years before, which was having a city that was a living, breathing entity with different factions and corporations with economic relationships to each other, and populated by traffic and people moving around. So we took that idea and put it in the *X-COM* universe, but this time the story was about multi-dimensional beings attacking the city. In retrospect it was entirely the wrong way to go,



» [PC] *UFO: Enemy Unknown*'s 'Geoscape' is vitally important for tracking UFO incursions into Earth's atmosphere.

> "I'm still staggered at the number of people who have played X-COM"

but nonetheless it was an interesting game with a number of innovations.

RG: What do you remember of the development process for *Apocalypse*, and do you think the game lived up to the high standards and expectations of fans of *UFO: Enemy Unknown*?

JG: We tried to expand the team, so we had level designers contracted in, mostly friends or friends of friends, so it didn't work quite so well as a development process. The artwork was done by MicroProse, but we had many frictions with them because we didn't like the art they were doing, and in fact it still didn't end up looking very nice in my opinion. Apart from the guy who designed the vehicles, who did a very good job – the aliens, city and buildings didn't look that good.

It was our first attempt at doing a real-time combat system. In fact, we were extravagantly ambitious in providing both a real-time and turn-based version – something that didn't quite work – and the game was probably over-complicated in many respects, and was a real pain to play. The thing that probably caused the most headaches was that the maps had multiple levels, which were somewhat confusing. So we kind of made some mistakes with that game, although it still sold well and was profitable.



RG: Do you have any regrets about your subsequent sale of the *X-COM* property to MicroProse?

JG: Well we didn't really have much of an option because the actual intellectual property rights were somewhat ambiguous. Our lawyers told us that if it came to a court battle MicroProse would probably win; their lawyers were clearly telling them that if it came to a court battle, we would win. They wanted us to do a deal where we would sign over any rights that we might have in return for some cash plus a high royalty on *X-COM: Apocalypse*. They more or less insisted on it, otherwise they were threatening to cancel the *Apocalypse* project, so there was a lot of bluff involved. We thought we may as well do it and afterwards, go and find some other publisher.

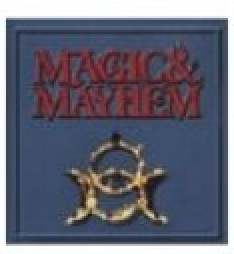
I do remember going to E3 in 1999 and MicroProse had a huge display for *X-COM: Alliance*, with giant tubes with alien foetuses and guys dressed up as aliens walking around, but when I went up to try and play the game they didn't really have anything playable. They were clearly having problems getting the engine to work properly. It was a squad-based game, four people in each squad, and it looked good, but it was kind of a tragic demo in a way – the playability wasn't there. It was later cancelled, of course.





» [PC] The isometric cityscape of *X-COM: Apocalypse*.

> “ Valkyria Chronicles has an eerily similar system to what we had with Dreamland ”



MAGIC & MAYHEM (1998) PC

The final release under the Mythos banner is an ambitious, story-driven real-time strategy game. Assuming the role of wannabe magician's apprentice Cornelius, players traverse three lands, gathering mana and magical elements and creating summon spells with which to do battle with rival wizards and hostile creatures. The game includes an enjoyable multiplayer skirmish mode that plays like an updated, real-time pseudo-3D *Chaos*.

RG: With *Magic & Mayhem* you updated some of the ideas and themes from *Chaos* and *Lords Of Chaos* for a contemporary audience. How successful do you think you were with bringing those ideas to PC gamers?

JG: The idea was to take some concepts from the original *Chaos*, with a wizard casting spells and summoning lots of creatures, and make a real-time strategy role-playing game. It was partially successful, and we had some arguments with Virgin about the role-playing aspect. We wanted to make it a little bit more involved, but they kept telling us that role-playing games didn't sell. *Baldur's Gate* hadn't yet come out when we had this argument…

We wanted something much more RPG-oriented where you had a number of characters with more involved attributes and equipment, while they wanted more focus on real-time strategy. But I think the basic system was very good. The multiplayer mode worked very well, in fact, and I enjoyed playing it. The single-player game was a bit less successful – it was our first real attempt at more sophisticated level design, the AI of your companions wasn't good, and it had a number of frustrations for the player. It was designed first as a multiplayer game and we sort of retrofitted the single-player experience, so it didn't work so well unfortunately, for me.

RG: What can you tell us about the cancelled *The Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge* project for Virgin, which was rumoured, in spirit, to be a full 3D version of your original *X-COM* game?

JG: Yes, it was designed as a sort of remake of *X-COM* for PC and PlayStation 2, and it was looking very promising actually. We were using a lot of new technology, including the Havok physics engine, which was very new at that stage. At the time we were one of the very few companies that were using it. It was quite an ambitious project – the closest thing I can relate it to is probably *Valkyria Chronicles* on the PS3. We had a third-person camera view behind your character with a bar representing your Action Points, which went down as you moved. When you went into shooting mode it went into a first-person view and you could select snap shots or aimed shots, which altered the size of an aiming circle on screen. So you did the shooting from that view, and went back to the third-person view to move your characters. In fact, when I first played *Valkyria Chronicles* it was quite eerie because it was a very similar system to what we had with *Dreamland*.



We also had an interesting destructible terrain system with lots of physics, so you could blow holes in buildings with a rocket launcher and see all the brickwork fly around, then move through the gaps, it was quite advanced for its time. Unfortunately Virgin got taken over by Interplay, who in turn got taken over by Titus Interactive. Titus had no interest in what we were doing – they were only after Interplay's assets, and they cancelled the project. But because we had a four-game deal with Virgin and had only done one game for them – *Magic & Mayhem* – we had no choice but to wind up the company at that point.



» Julian's brother Nick collaborated on many projects including *Laser Squad*, *Lords Of Chaos* and the *X-COM* games.



LASER SQUAD NEMESIS (2002) PC

After Mythos Games disbanded following *Magic & Mayhem*, Julian and brother Nick returned to their roots with this reboot of *Laser Squad*, released via the web on their newly formed Codo Technologies label. It's an incredibly polished product, refining the combat engine of *X-COM* with new features such as the ability to rewind turns and switch between turn-based tactical and real-time play at any point in the game.



REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND (2005) GBA

The Gollop brothers' final collaborative project, *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* is a worthy addition to the GBA strategy game catalogue, and a welcome nod to Julian's early budget Spectrum classics. It's a plot-driven tactical role-playing game perhaps closer in spirit to Japanese titles like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, while successfully evoking elements of the *X-COM* franchise with its alien invasion storyline.

RG: You revisited two of your old franchises with *Laser Squad Nemesis* for the PC and *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* for the Game Boy Advance. Did you enjoy going back to your roots with these games and updating them for modern audiences?

JG: Well we wanted to wind back the scale. *Laser Squad Nemesis* was done by myself, Nick and another ex-colleague from Mythos. We programmed the first version in a year, and the game is still going. It started as a play-by-email system, and we later added a simple web-based interface, which gives you a list of the games you're currently playing and allows you to download turns. It was important that it was a sort of asynchronous turn-based/real-time game and I think it worked quite well. *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* was a game that just me and Nick worked on, which came about via a contact we had with Namco, who were thinking about setting up a studio in the UK. That didn't happen, but it turned out that they had a spare slot for a GBA game and asked if we could fill it, so we said yes. It was quite tough because we had to produce the game in eight months, and we'd never worked on the GBA before. It had some rather awkward and unique challenges, and because it was just myself and Nick we had to find people to do artwork, but what we managed to do in eight months was not bad actually.

RG: Well, *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* does actually have the look and feel of a Japanese tactical RPG like *Final Fantasy Tactics* or *Disgaea*, which is interesting. It's almost like you've come full circle in a genre that you helped pioneer and was then taken up so successfully by Japanese developers…

JG: Yes, I guess so. In fact I'd pursued RPG elements in games like *Lords Of Chaos* and *Magic & Mayhem*, and maybe could have pushed them a little further, so the GBA project was a nice opportunity to do a more tactical RPG, which



Detail from the original box art for *UFO: Enemy Unknown*.

was cool. And I can reveal that I am currently working on a new tactical RPG for the Nintendo 3DS, the new Nintendo machine.

RG: Sounds great! Spill the beans, Julian. What's the new game, then?

JG: Well the title's not fully decided yet, but it's a tactical RPG based on the *Ghost Recon* universe. Gameplay-wise it's going to be a turn-based tactical combat game with some similarities to *Advance Wars* or *Fire Emblem*, but obviously with a lot of original ideas from us and the *Ghost Recon* universe. Me working on it isn't actually a secret – it's just that I haven't actually told anyone else yet…

RG: We were going to ask if we'd ever see another tactical strategy game from you, so that answers the question nicely. How did this all come about?

JG: I started working as a game designer at Ubisoft in Sofia in November 2006. I quickly became a producer, then sometime in late 2007 I pitched the idea of doing an *X-COM*-style game using one of Ubisoft's franchises. They said they had a *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* game due out that year so I said, 'Okay, we'll do a '*Ghost Recon Tactics*'.' It was originally going to be for the DS, but last year we decided to try and get it approved for the new Nintendo handheld, which we didn't know much about at the time. We got the dev kits relatively early, so we're currently on the final stages of finishing the game, so it should be out in Europe early next year.

RG: What other strategy games have you admired or been inspired by over the years?

JG: Most of the recent stuff that's inspired me has all been Japanese. I remember playing *Vandal Hearts* on the PlayStation and thinking, 'Wow, this is the kind of game I would have liked to have done if I'd had the chance.' I enjoyed *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Advance Wars* and *Fire Emblem* on the Game Boy Advance. In fact, when I came across *Advance Wars* back in 2001 I was amazed that anybody could make a turn-based strategy game in this day and age, so kudos to Nintendo for doing it so successfully.

RG: *Advance Wars* reminded us of *History Line 1914-18* on the Amiga. Did you ever play that? Great game…

JG: No, but I did play *Battle Isle*, which I think was similar…

RG: When you look back at your games, are there any that you're particularly fond or proud of?

JG: Well, *X-COM* – the original, of course – and probably *Laser Squad Nemesis*. I've enjoyed playing that immensely with many people.

RG: Lastly, have you enjoyed working with Nick over the years? Any sibling squabbles, or has it always been a case of brotherly love with the odd digital alien autopsy to be coded by the morning?

JG: [laughs] Well he has always been pretty good. He's a very good programmer, and is obviously familiar with the kind of games I'm interested in. So by and large I'd say we've worked together pretty well.

THE READERS ON GOLLOP'S GAMES

What's your favourite Julian Gollop game? Our readers share their memories



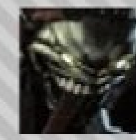
Jdanddiet "*Chaos* just edges it… closely followed by all the others."



psj3809 "*Rebelstar I* and *II*. Superb strategy games and amazing for only £1.99! First strategy games I really liked."



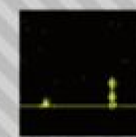
Nreive "I'm going to have to stick with my all-time fave game *Laser Squad*. Julian Gollop took his previous efforts to an all-new level and it played great on all the main gaming platforms at the time. A superb sci-fi strategy game – the expansion packs were great fun too."



thevulture "Damn tricky one, but for most hours absorbed by it, *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. The pinnacle of what had gone before it – *Rebelstar*, *Laser Squad*, etc. Bet the forthcoming reboot is not a patch on this timeless classic."



Morkin "I'd have to go for *Rebelstar Tactical Command*. Great game indeed."



Matt_B "I'll have to go for *UFO* for adding a superb strategic element alongside the tactical combat of the other games. *Chaos* deserves an honourable mention for being the most social of all Spectrum games, though. It was definitely the game to go for when you had more than one friend round."

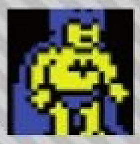


HalcyonDaze00 "*Laser Squad* vs *UFO: Enemy Unknown* is a very tough choice so I will sit on the fence and say *Laser Squad* for two-player game and *UFO: Enemy Unknown* for single-player… but I voted for *UFO*."



necronom "*UFO: Enemy Unknown*. It's one of the best games I ever bought on the Amiga. I also bought *Laser Squad*, which was very good as well. I don't know if I realised at the time that both were designed by the same person."





batman877 "*Laser Squad* for me. It was amazing on every platform it was released for. A true classic."



Thulsadoom "I used to play *Chaos* and *Rebelstar* for hours. Absolutely brilliant games! I had to narrowly vote for *Rebelstar*, due to its large environment and that it always felt like tactics were more involved. However, *Chaos* was always superb when you got a few family members banded together and had a face-off, firing all those spells at each other! Gooey blob, anyone?"



Stickhead "*Lords Of Chaos*. It's *Chaos* but with an exploration/adventuring element – what's not to love? Come on, add it to the poll. It's got harpies and everything."

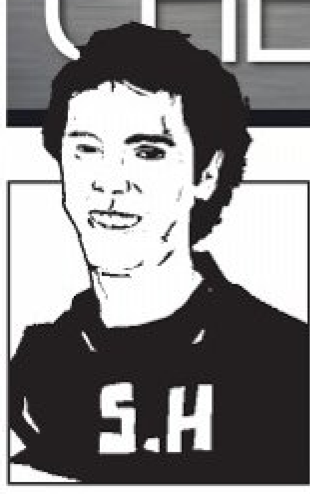




Thanks to Nuno Barros at **www.chaosquad.mediacorporation.net** for his kind assistance during the creation of this article.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

ZOOP

Despite finding release on a large number of platforms, it's likely that a few of you have never heard of *Zoop*. It was developed by Hookstone, a small UK outfit that only made a handful of titles in its relatively short life in the game-making biz – including *Sentinel Returns*, the sequel to Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* – and was a great mixture of puzzle game and shoot-'em-up that never gained the attention it deserved on its release.

Published by Viacom, it's easy to see why a media company picked up the rights to the game. With its shoot-'em-up sensibilities, *Zoop* was a pretty innovative puzzle game for its time, but finding a release inside that awkward 1995 era, the period in which the industry really started making the jump to 3D games, *Zoop* struggled to gain the interest expected. Because of this, though, it's quite common to see a few copies of the game floating around on eBay.

Zoop finds the player controlling a little triangle that sits in a square at the centre of the screen. The square acts as the game's playfield, and at each of its four sides sits a channel that gradually fills with different coloured shapes that slowly advance towards the centre of the screen. A stage is complete when the player successfully holds out long enough to reach a certain score – points are earned for 'zooping' shapes – and the game ends if any of the shapes enter the square.

Thankfully for the wellbeing of the square, your triangular avatar has the power to destroy, or rather 'zoop', these invading shapes by boomeranging itself at any of them, or their lines, that are of the same colour. When hitting a shape of a differing hue, the shape and your avatar will simply swap colours, opening up more offensive options. And sometimes the game will throw a bomb in among the shapes that will take out large numbers of them based on colour, position or proximity to the bomb, just to mix things up. With four gullies of shapes to manage and the frequent colour-swapping that occurs, *Zoop* gameplay gets frantic pretty quickly.

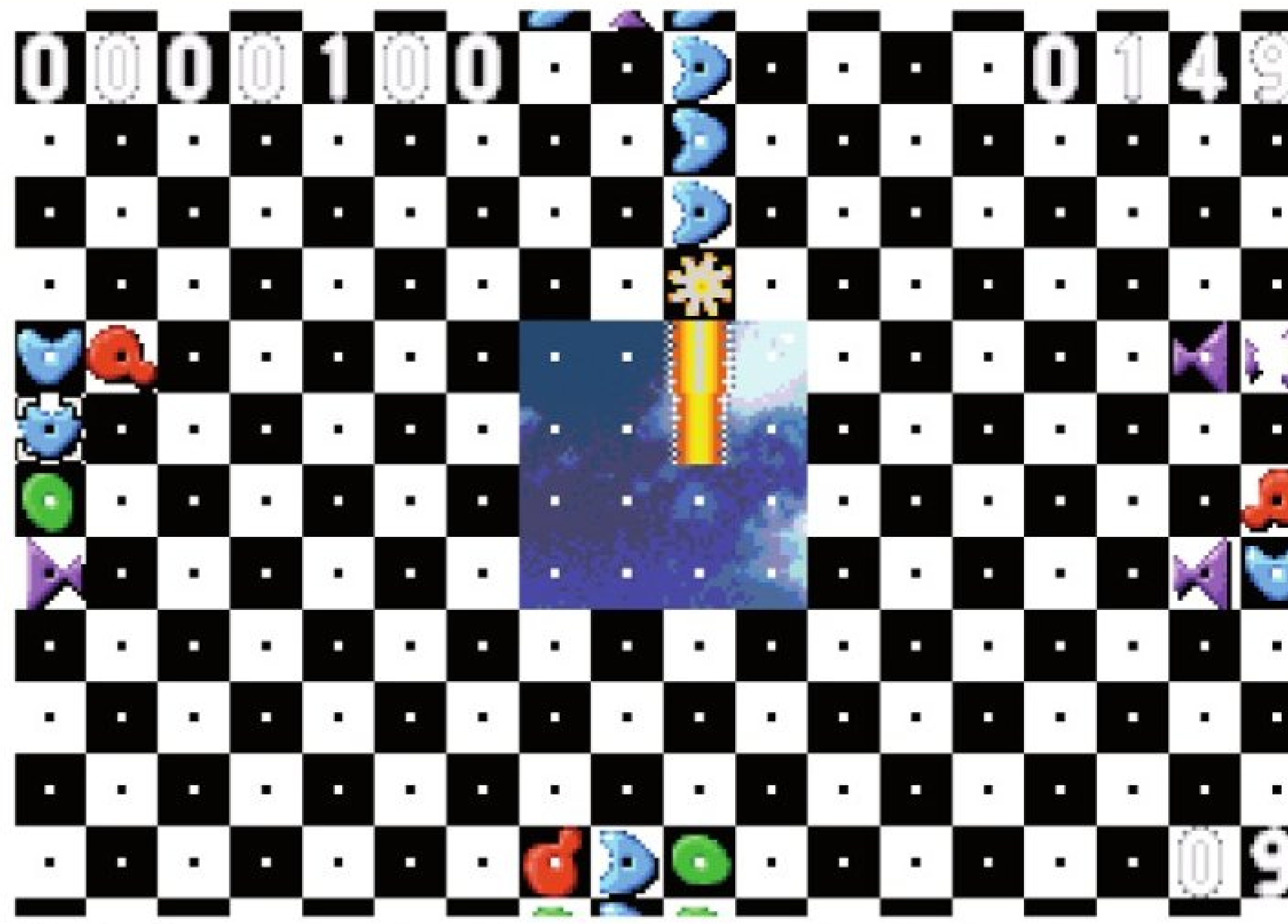
Aside from the genre splicing, there are other aspects that help *Zoop* stand out from its puzzling contemporaries. Its soundtrack consists of jazz music that gets notably faster and messier the further you get in the game, and it makes use of backgrounds that get increasingly gaudy to heighten the challenge – as you can see from the screenshots. The chequered flag design, for instance, is taken from the game's ninth stage, and shows the extent to which the backgrounds will try to confuse and befuddle the player.

If you're any kind of fan of the puzzle genre, especially one with an equal love for shooters, jazz music and flock wallpaper, then you'll find much to love about *Zoop*. Playing it while nursing a hangover, though, is certainly not advised.

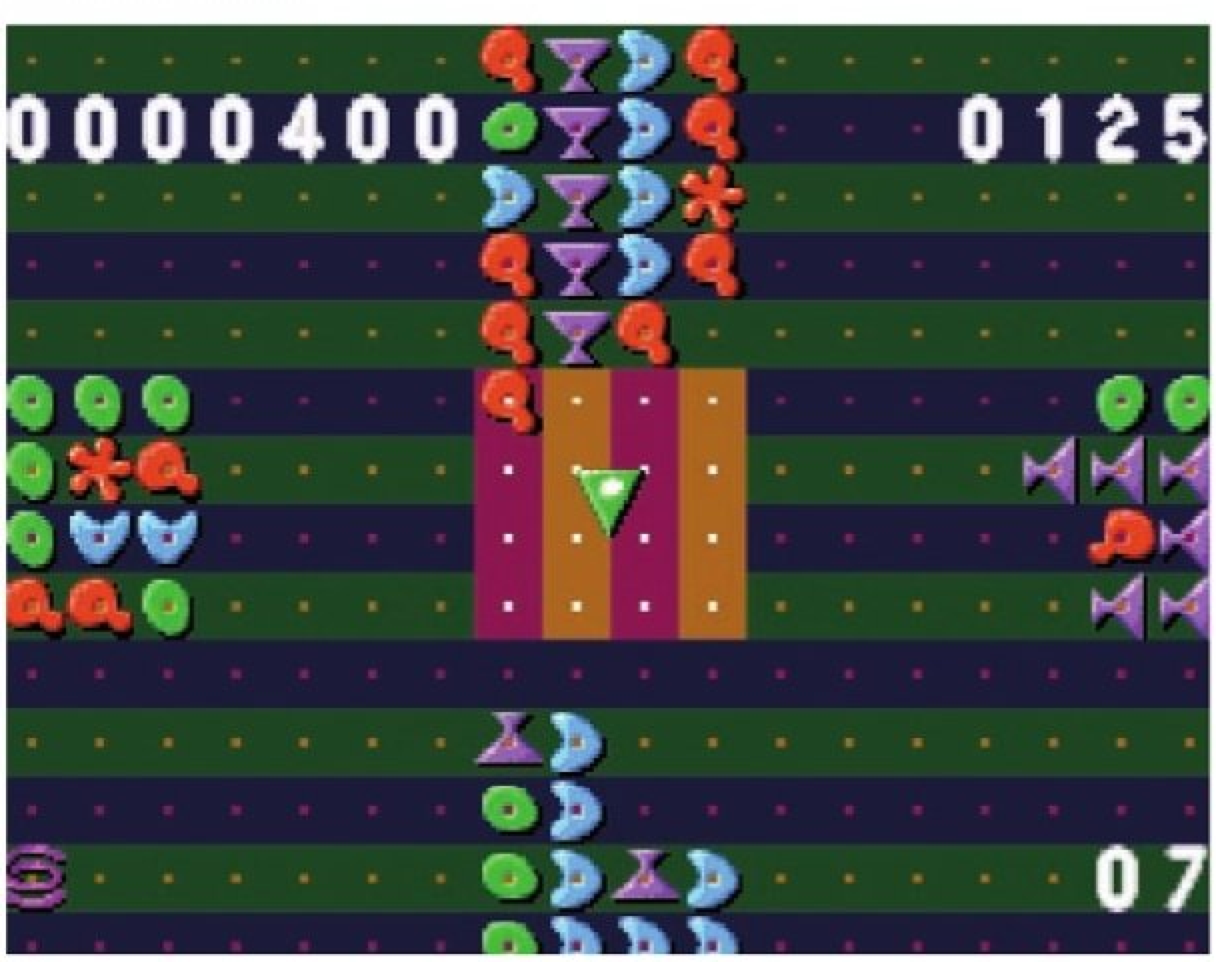


INFO

- **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, JAGUAR, MEGA DRIVE, PC, PLAYSTATION, SATURN, SNES
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PUBLISHER:** VIACOM
- **DEVELOPER:** HOOKSTONE PRODUCTIONS

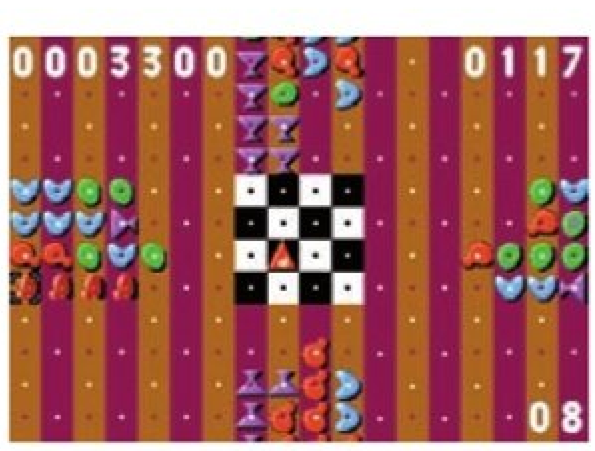


» [Mega Drive] If you stare at this particular level for long enough it's possible to see a fuzzy yellow unicorn eating a strawberry.



» [Mega Drive] The game ends when one of the invading shapes enters the centre square. It's kind of like *Zulu* but starring an army of wine gums.







» [Mega Drive] The early stages of the game are far easier on the eyes, but the gameplay is still chaotic.

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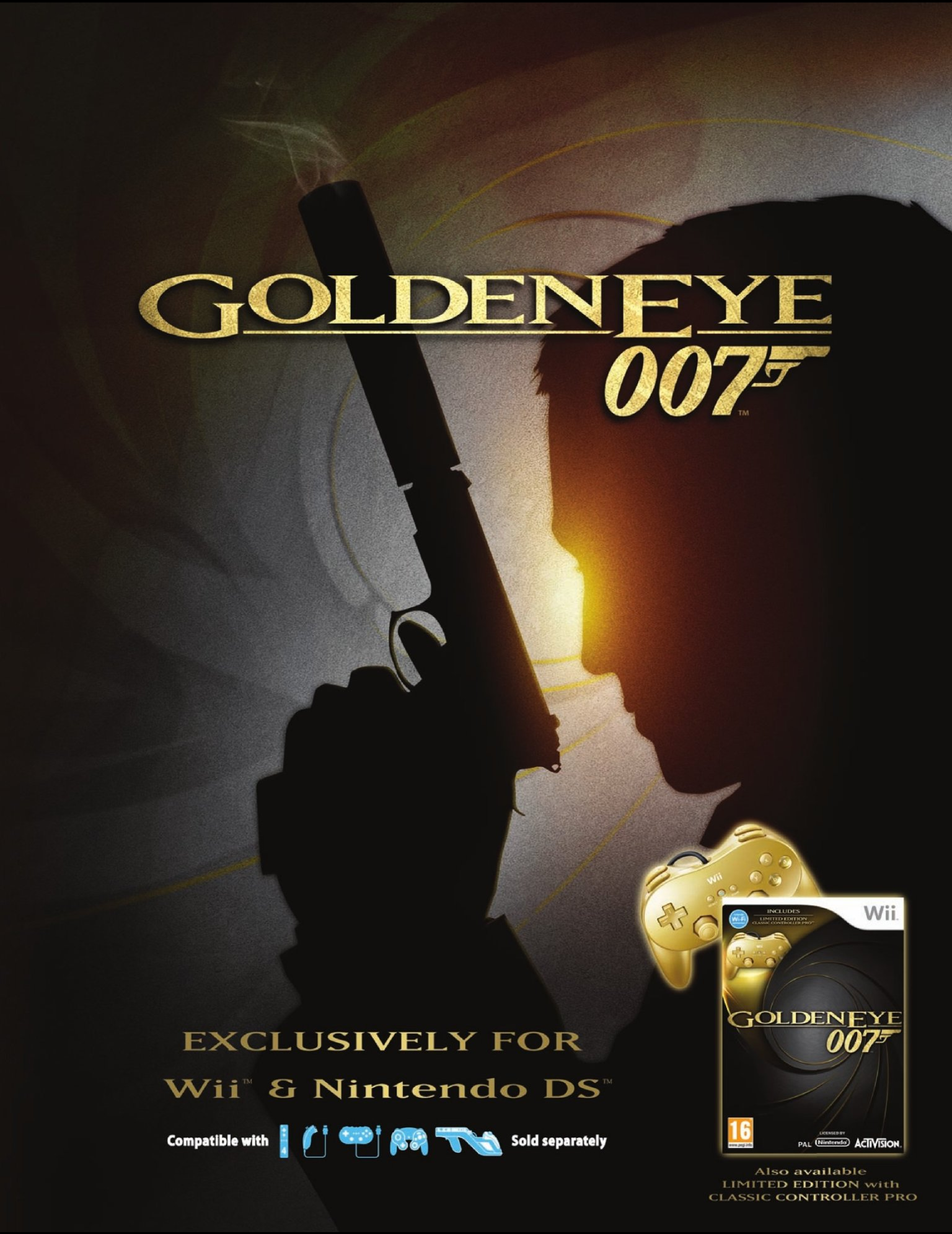
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SAME NAME DIFFERENT GAME

When going by that front cover simply isn't enough



» [Mega Drive] The omission of Tails in the 8-bit conversions is a particularly noticeable change.

Case 10: Sonic The Hedgehog

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1991-1992

On initial inspection, Sega's Sonic games appear to be identical on the Master System and Mega Drive – graphical limitations excluded, of course. Dig deeper, however, and you'll find that they're separate games in their own right.



Exhibit 1: Mega Drive

■ It's easy to take *Sonic The Hedgehog* for granted nowadays thanks to constant 3D botchery, but back in 1991 this release on the Mega Drive marked a new era for Sega. He performed the triple threat of rivalling Mario in popularity, helping Sega compete in the 16-bit war against Nintendo, and becoming the company's new mascot. Not bad for a blue erinaceid with a penchant for natty red slippers.

Brilliantly stylised and insanely fast, *Sonic The Hedgehog* remains a truly enjoyable platformer, even if it has been eclipsed by its 2D sequels. Inventive level design, excellent tunes and gorgeously slick visuals all combine to create one of Sega's most important games.



» [Mega Drive] Designed to take advantage of the Mega Drive's speedy processing, the 16-bit version is far superior technically.

Exhibit 2: Master System

■ Give the Master System version of *Sonic* a casual glance and you'd be tricked into thinking that it's just the Mega Drive game with inferior visuals. Start playing, though, and you'll quickly realise your error.

Master System *Sonic* features the same six-zone, three-stage structure as the Mega Drive, but that's where the similarities end. Marble Zone, Spring Yard Zone and Star Light Zone are nowhere to be seen, replaced by Bridge Zone, Jungle Zone and Sky Base Zone. Even the original zones have been restructured, with the emphasis more on exploring.

The impressive bonus stage is also gone, replaced with a level full of springs and coins. Another interesting change is that you can't recover lost rings, which makes this game far tougher than its bigger 16-bit brother.

The emphasis may no longer be on speed, but *Sonic*'s 8-bit outing remains a polished platformer that even non-fans will enjoy. Full of secrets and featuring great visuals and audio, it's an excellent effort.

Exhibit 3: Game Gear

■ As with many Master System and Game Gear conversions, there are very few differences between the two games. Sonic himself is far better detailed, levels feel slightly zoomed in, and the tunes sound a little nicer on the ears. There are a few subtle tweaks to some of the stages, but many are so slight that you'll most likely not notice them on your first run through. In fact, the only reason that we're including the Game Gear version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* as a separate outing is that it feels much faster than the Master System offering, making it something of a halfway house between the sedate pace of the 8-bit game and the breakneck speed of the Mega Drive outing.





Exhibit 4: Game Boy Advance/N-Gage

■ Sega ported *Sonic* to the Game Boy Advance and N-Gage, and both are pretty awful so we're including them together. The biggest issue with both is that the screens have been zoomed in, meaning that unless you're a *Sonic* savant you'll have no time to respond to anything that appears on screen. It's an issue that's made even worse on the N-Gage thanks to its vertical screen.

Other changes to the Game Boy Advance version include a new Anniversary mode, which allows you to use the spin attack from *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and features slightly remixed music. It's also possible to revisit single levels once you've completed them, but the game is so bad that you're never likely to ever play it again. Truly abominable.



The Verdict: It was always going to be the Mega Drive game, but we still find ourselves really drawn to the Master System outing.



Case 11: Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992



Exhibit 1: Mega Drive

■ For many gamers, Sonic's second 2D adventure remains his best, and it's easy to see way. Building upon the brilliance of his original outing, Sonic Team introduced the handy spin dash, added a far more impressive bonus round, and introduced a second character in the form of Miles 'Tails' Prower, which greatly added to the game's longevity, even if the multiplayer stages were all squashed up as a result.

Zones are far larger in size – although this means that they seldom consist of three acts – and offer a lot more variety than they did in *Sonic 1*, while Sonic's encounters with Dr Robotnik are far better due to more challenging attack patterns. It's even possible for Sonic to become Super Sonic – providing he's acquired all seven Chaos Emeralds – which greatly changes the gameplay. Big, bold and brash, it's the definitive *Sonic* game and should be experienced by anyone with a love of platformers.



» [Mega Drive] A rare moment of solitude for Sonic in the Mega Drive version of *Sonic 2*.

Exhibit 2: Master System

■ Amazingly, Sonic's second 8-bit outing never actually appeared on the Master System in Japan or America, which is rather strange when you consider how successful the franchise was becoming.

As with the original *Sonic*, there are plenty of differences between the 8 and 16-bit offerings. The most obvious is that despite appearing on the title screen Tails is nowhere to be seen. Due to being conveniently captured by Dr Robotnik, Sega was able to solve the issues of a second player that would have no doubt been quite taxing on its 8-bit console, leaving Sonic to battle through the stages on his lonesome.

Fortunately he's picked up a few tricks since his first 8-bit adventure and he's now able to use mine carts and even a hang glider on certain stages. Admittedly it feels a world away from the Mega Drive offering, but it does work surprisingly well, even if the end result is a game that feels more *Mario* than *Sonic*. Another important omission from the Mega Drive offering is that Sonic's spin dash is absent, although he can still break through certain walls by building up speed and then pressing down to get through them.

Even Dr Robotnik takes a back seat in *Sonic 2*, only making an appearance on the first – where he bizarrely rescues Sonic from certain death – and last stages of the game. Instead, boss encounters mainly consist of Sonic facing off against robotic animals, including his first encounter with Mecha Sonic. It's an interesting outing, but its sheer difficulty makes it really hard to love.

Exhibit 3: Game Gear

■ The handheld version of *Sonic 2* is largely similar to the Master System version, so as a result there's very little to talk about. Certain stages feature different sound arrangements on them, and there are two distinct tunes for each of the game's endings and different boss music, but otherwise this is nigh-on identical to the Master System version.

The main reason we're including it as a separate entity is that, as with the first *Sonic* game, it feels slightly faster to play and has a slightly reduced playing area, which makes many of the boss encounters far tougher than they are in the Master System game.





» [Master System] This version provides debuts for elements that would later become staples of the *Sonic* series.





» [Game Gear] Robotnik's appearances in the 8-bit games may prove surprising to fans.

The Verdict:
The Mega Drive version, hands down. It's just an amazingly polished platformer that still plays brilliantly today.

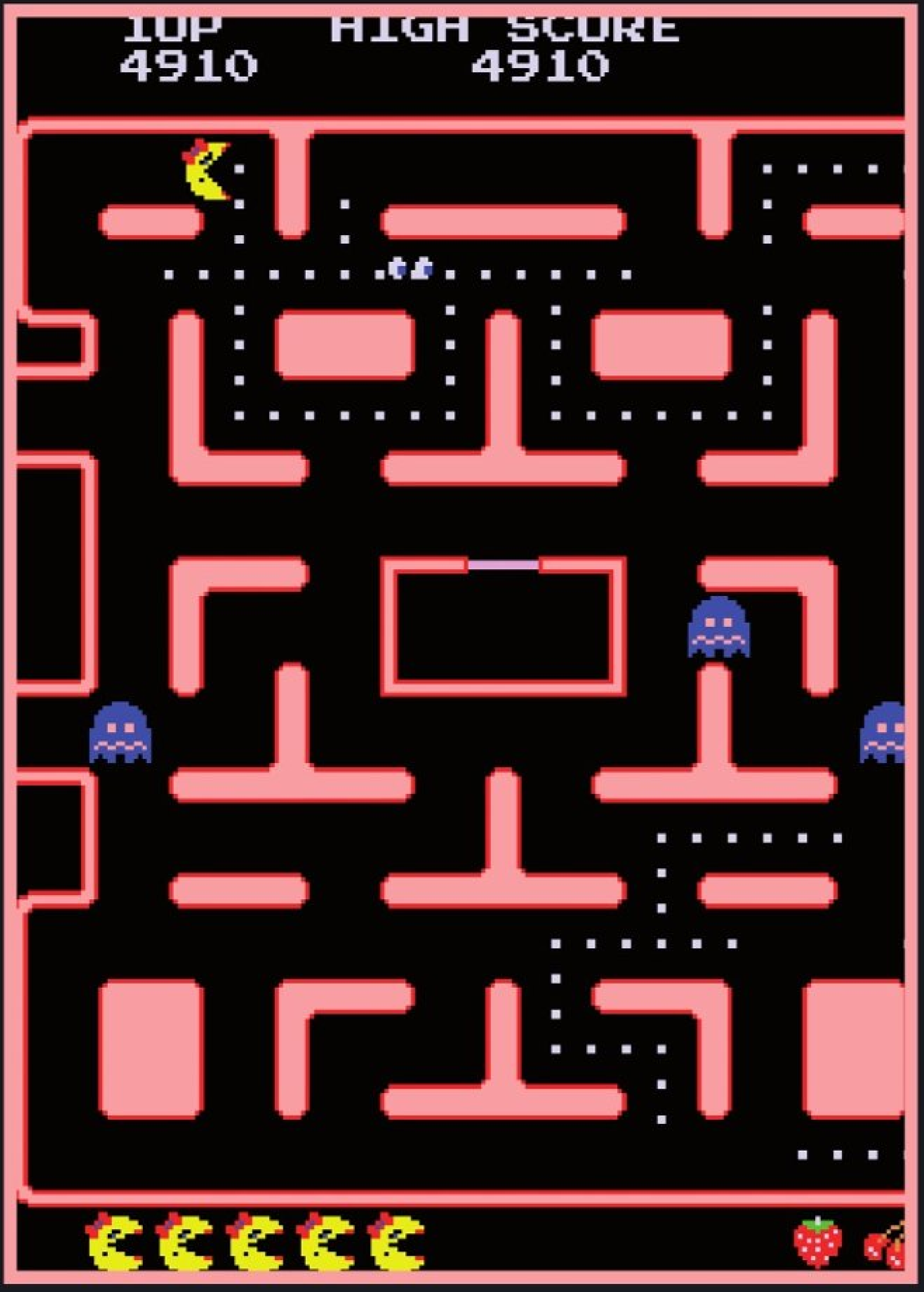


The great love of Pac-Man's life once had legs, wasn't a 'Ms.' and was branded 'crazy'. Craig Grannell unlocks the full story behind the classic maze game, with the help of GCC alumni Doug Macrae, Steve Golson and Mike Horowitz



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY/NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** GENERAL COMPUTER CORPORATION
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1981
- » **GENRE:** MAZE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £600+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET IN GOOD CONDITION



Classic arcade games were designed to be brutal, aiming to hook a player, end games quickly and encourage further coins to be deposited. But however tough developers made their creations, gamers mastered them, leading to hours-long sessions on single coins, angering revenue-hungry operators.

For popular titles, after-market add-ons were sometimes used to ramp up difficulty and further challenge the best players. Most faded into obscurity, but one outshone and outsold its parent, surviving legal challenges, a publisher spat and an abrupt sex change for its main character. The title in question: *Ms. Pac-Man.*

The game's origins began at MIT. Doug Macrae was operating a pinball machine in his dorm, until he took on Kevin Curran as a partner and began purchasing additional machines. "We quickly expanded into operating 20 arcade machines across four dorms," recalls Macrae. Three machines were *Missile Command,* which initially performed well. However, the coin count dropped as people mastered or tired of the game. "We came up with the idea of creating enhancement kits to address these issues, adding new features, algorithms and difficulty levels."

By this point, Macrae and Curran had moved out of the dorm and were renting a house in Brookline, Massachusetts, along with like-minded programmers and videogame enthusiasts Steve Golson, Mike Horowitz, John Tylko, Chris Rode and Larry Dennison.

"By April, General Computer Corporation (GCC) was incorporated, with Doug and Kevin as owners," recalls Golson. "The kit was named *Super Missile Attack*, and most of us dropped out of MIT, because working on games was more interesting than going to class." Adverts were taken out in trade magazines, and the kit was a big success.

With gamers and arcade owners happy with *Super Missile Attack*, and interest coming from manufacturers, brokers and importers within the videogames industry, the team started thinking about other games to enhance. "We started working on kits for *Asteroids* and *Pac-Man*," says Golson. "Work on the *Asteroids* kit didn't get far. For an enhancement kit to be successful, you need a large installed base, so only the most popular arcade games are good targets. *Asteroids* was the biggest build of any game in the USA – 77,000 cabinets – but by mid-1981 it looked like *Pac-Man* was going to beat that by a wide margin."

Much of the team didn't consider *Pac-Man* to be a great game, and aside from its popularity, the main reason for creating a kit was because of the game's deficiencies. "I wasn't a fan, but everyone else on the planet was, so we knew an after-market add-on would be popular," explains Mike Horowitz. "And since the game was so deterministic – every game played exactly the same way – it was easy to make much, much better."

> **"We had no idea what a big deal it would be. But by 1982, we had the hottest arcade game in the USA!"**
>
> From courts to charts in a year

The initial idea was to get the kit, dubbed *Crazy Otto*, to market in late 1981, when *Pac-Man* games in arcades would stop making money. Although the game's visuals were more advanced than *Pac-Man*'s – bipedal characters boasted more animation frames and the maze was solid and colourful – the biggest changes were gameplay-oriented, adding randomness and more mazes. "Once players had learned *Pac-Man*'s maze, they could play forever, and many became bored," says Macrae. Horowitz adds: "Adding more mazes made the game harder and acted as an incentive, because players had a reason to get to higher levels."

"There was an idea that players would get used to a maze and then, after the first two, there would be something new. Then, after another three racks, another new maze! How many were there? Players would be eager to figure that out," reasons Golson. "And each maze had its own quirks to learn, along with increasing the difficulty in later levels due to there being fewer escape tunnels and more corners to get trapped in."

According to Macrae, mazes were initially sketched on graph paper, and the designers would look at various layouts to see which would be the most exciting to play. They would then get coded and tested. "Some worked very well and some did not," he says candidly, although Golson remembers this aspect of the game "came very quickly", with few variations and little tweaking.

Another major change focused on how the monsters moved.

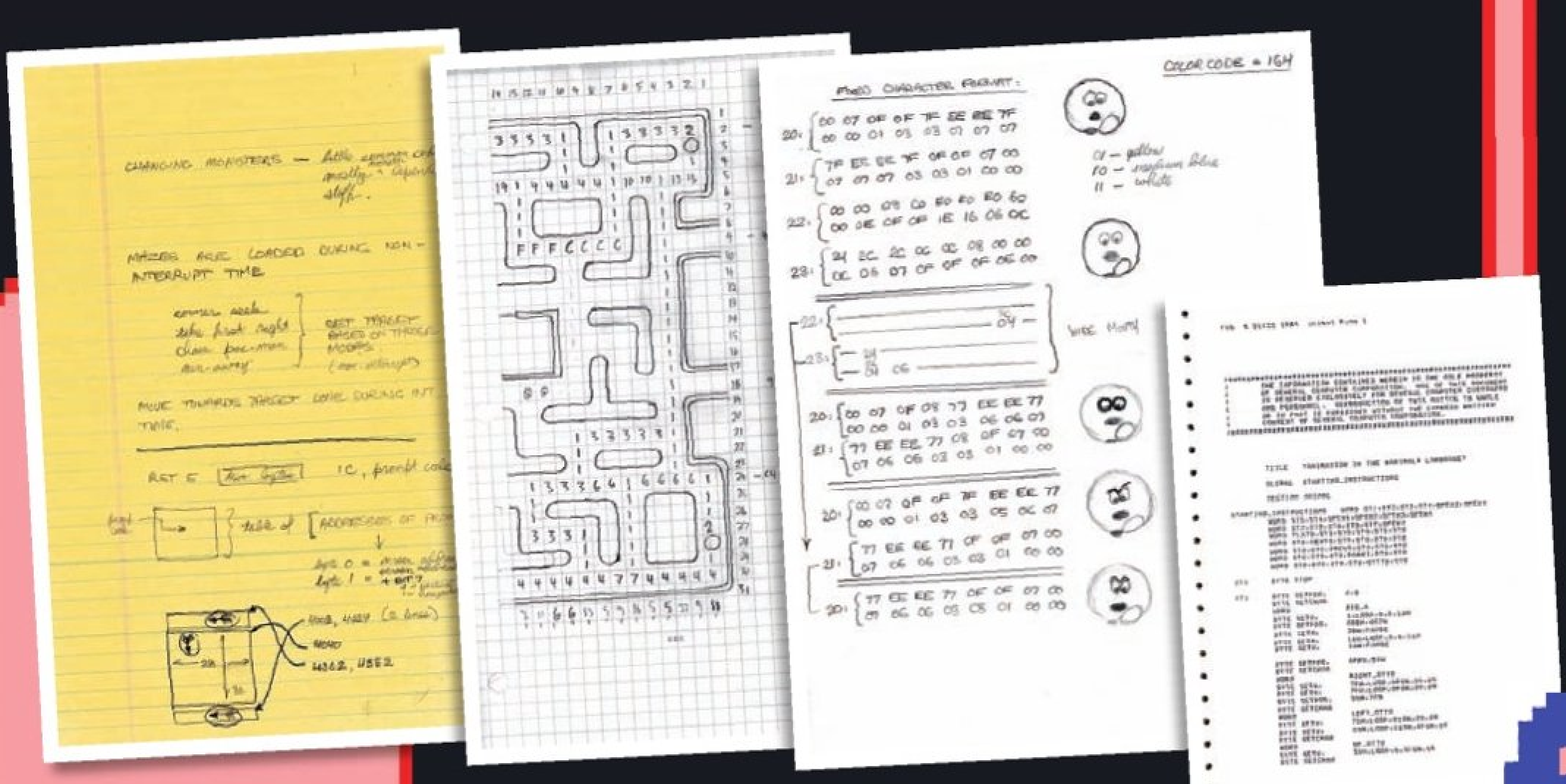
» Speculation surrounding the development of *Crazy Otto* stems from a single photo in *Time*'s January 1982 issue.



CRAZY OTTO'S ACCIDENTAL DEBUT

MUCH SPECULATION SURROUNDING *Crazy Otto* can be traced to 'Games that play people', an article from the January 1982 issue of *Time* magazine. "So it's January 1982 and we're finally done with *Ms. Pac-Man*. We're in the new GCC offices and Mike Horowitz shows us an issue of *Time*, with an article on videogames," recalls Golson. Horowitz asks if there's any way of telling if a photo of *Missile Command* in fact shows GCC's *Super Missile Attack* kit, but Chris Rode says that's not possible from an in-game shot. "'Oh well,' we thought. 'We're not famous'," laughs Golson. "And then we glanced to the bottom of the page, to a screen grab captioned: 'Pac Man scuttles about a maze, eating dots'. Only it's not *Pac-Man* in the grab – it's *Crazy Otto*!"

Golson posits that some time in December 1981, *Time*'s photographer went to a Chicago arcade, saw a line of yellow cabinets, all labelled *Pac-Man*, and picked one at the end of a row, or the one that had a bright pink maze, rather than a dark blue one that's hard to photograph, and took a photo. "At the time, there were 96,000 *Pac-Man* cabinets in the USA, and only three had been converted to *Crazy Otto*, out on test play. What are the odds the photographer would pick one? Amazing," he says. "And so *Crazy Otto*'s been famous all these years, with that photo leading to much speculation about the mythical '*Pac-Man* with legs'. Now, finally, the history of *Crazy Otto* is coming out."

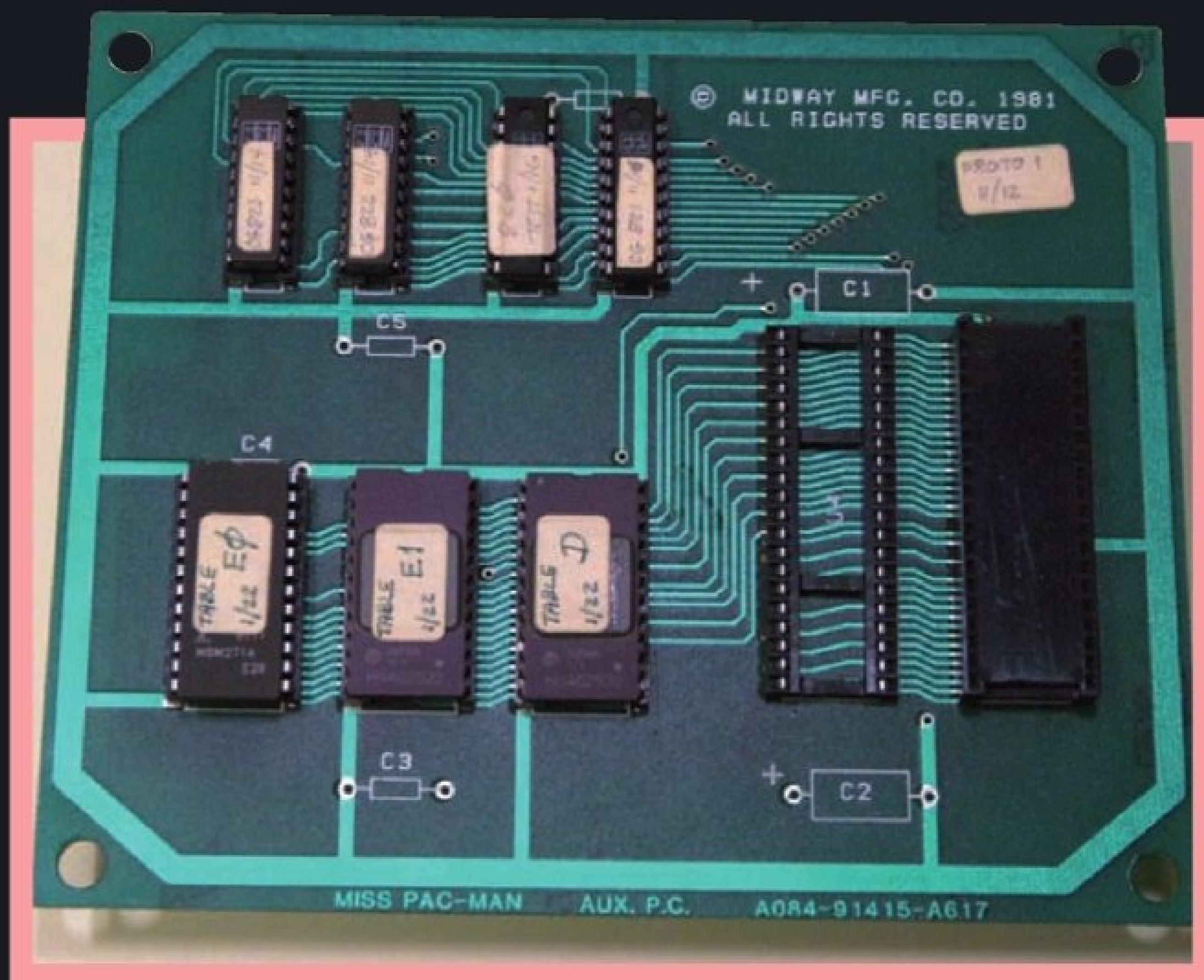


» Early gameplay and programming ideas and design work for *Crazy Otto*.

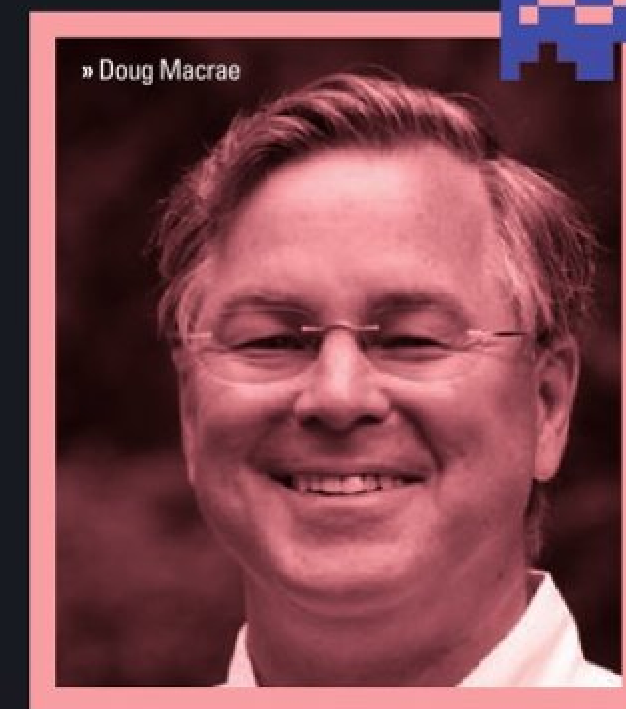
PRETZEL LOGIC

UNLIKE IN *PAC-MAN*, whose bonuses ranged from fruit to a *Galaxian* boss, *Ms. Pac-Man*'s roaming bonuses were all fruits, with the exception of a pretzel. "During the development of *Crazy Otto* we were concerned about trademark infringement, and so we changed all the characters, but there were also four bonus items," remembers Golson. "There was a spaceship – many didn't recognise it as a character from *Galaxian*, but that would have caused clear trademark problems. We were also concerned about the key and the bell, and the bunch of grapes was an issue simply because players didn't recognise it – people often thought it was a hand grenade!"

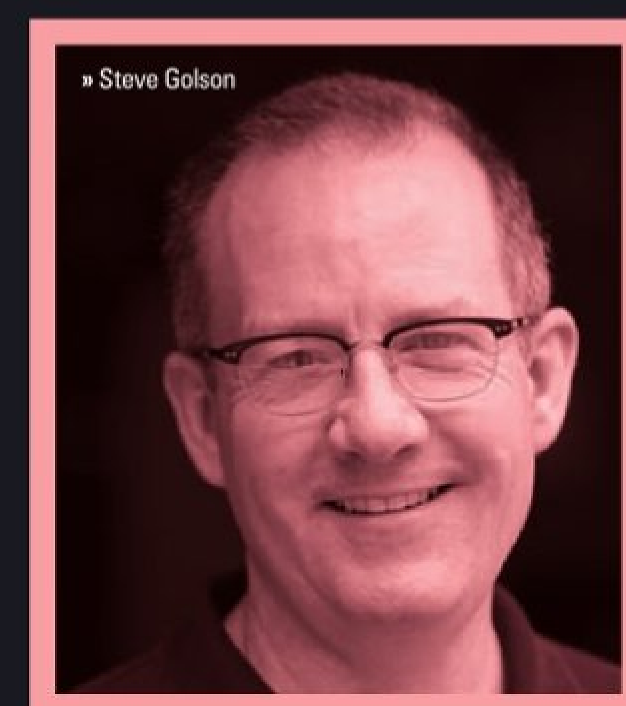
In the end, the team required seven objects, because that was how many could be displayed at the foot of the screen, and so three new fruits were needed. "We had limited colours and only 14x14 pixels, and so we wondered what fruits would be obvious to the player," says Golson. "We added a pear and banana, but needed one more. Kevin Curran really loved pretzels, so the pretzel was put in for him, and it was easy – just two colours!"



» The first board that Golson received from Midway, on 12 November 1981. Note the early '*Miss Pac-Man*' name.



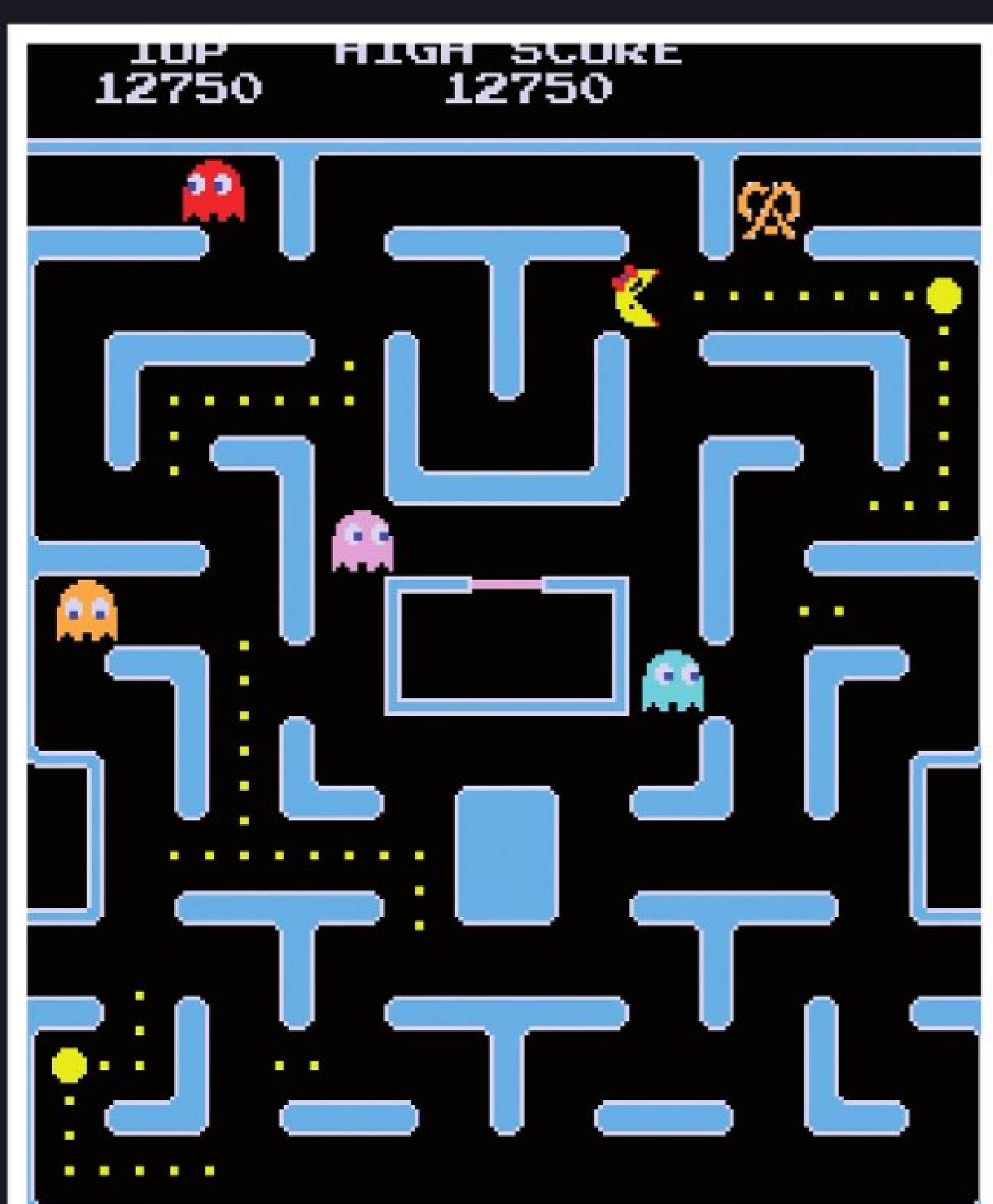
» Doug Macrae



» Steve Golson

"Many players took a while to realise that the monsters were no longer predictable"

Ms. Pac-Man had a few surprises in store for Pac-Man masters



» [Arcade] A decidedly non-fruity pretzel roams the maze, due to Kevin Curran's love of the snack food.

"Adding randomness to that aspect of the game was the most important change," claims Horowitz. "The original algorithm for ghost movement meant that on early racks, Pac-Man could 'hide' in certain spots and the ghosts would never find him." This predictability was so obvious that a book of patterns was published – *How To Win At Pac-Man* – and so the team realised that this was the major deficiency to attack.

The flaw was fixed, according to Macrae, by generating a random number that could be used to determine the monsters' behaviours, thereby stopping most pattern play, and by addressing 'intelligence' algorithms, making each monster a slightly smarter adversary. Golson outlined for us some specifics of how this worked. The game uses true randomness: there's a free-running 7-bit counter in the Z80 microprocessor (the R register). It's intended for automatic refresh of DRAM, but Golson says it "makes a great random number generator – it's very unpredictable". At any given time, monsters are in one of several 'modes' – chase, run away, take next left turn, go to the monster's 'home' corner. The team amended the last of those, instead sending monsters to a random corner. "It's just enough to mess up pattern play, although in higher racks, monsters spend most time in chase mode, so randomness affects gameplay less and patterns become more useful," explains Golson. There was also a late change to the red monster: "We found a spot in the first maze where Otto could hide and never get eaten, and so Mike changed the red monster to eventually lock into chase mode."

Horowitz elaborates: "We thought we'd eradicated hiding spots, but late in development I found one, which caused a bit of a panic. It was too late to modify the first maze, so I made it that when the red monster went into chase mode, he stayed that way, meaning there were then no hiding places." This resulted in a tougher game during its early levels, further magnified by the fact that, according to Golson, many players took a while to realise that the monster algorithms were no longer predictable.

More changes added extra polish and interest. First, bonuses now roamed the mazes. "The *Pac-Man* hardware supports six moving objects. There's Pac-Man, four monsters and the bonus, but in *Pac-Man* the bonus never moves," says Golson. "We decided to change this.



» [Arcade] The mazes in *Crazy Otto* are identical to those in *Ms. Pac-Man*. Only character graphics and bonus items were redesigned.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER MISSILE ATTACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1981

MS. PAC-MAN
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

QUANTUM
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982

At first, the fruit was going to bounce through the maze and suddenly blow up, using an 'explosion' character we found in the original graphics ROM. That didn't look good, though, so once we had the fruit coded to move into the maze, we ran it backwards if Otto didn't grab it first." Again, randomness was used to make the game less predictable – there are several predetermined paths, but they're chosen at random, so you never know exactly where the bonus will go. "Also, once you get past level 7, the fruit is randomly chosen," notes Golson. "This annoyed really serious players, because in a high level, you might get a cheap 100-point bonus instead of the maximum 5,000, making it hard to get the 'highest possible' score."

Elsewhere, Horowitz worked on new intermissions: "Since these were just for fun and didn't impact gameplay, it was an obvious choice to write new ones," he recalls. "My inspiration was to adapt the age-old 'girl meets boy', 'girl chases boy', 'girl gets the boy' story."

Aside from the first maze's hiding-place blip, the impression given is of an almost effortless *Crazy Otto* development, and so how easy was the game to create from a technical standpoint? "That depends on your definition of easy," says Horowitz, who explains that all the team had to work with were *Pac-Man*'s ROMs. "We had to reverse-engineer the entire game, which was a tedious process, although luckily we had a microprocessor emulator. This meant we could view the raw assembly language output from the program ROMs and map the program ROMs to writable memory, enabling us to make changes and immediately see the results." He adds that GCC also couldn't infringe on the copyright of the original code: "We could only add patches – jumps to the program memory on our daughter card."

Creating new graphics and sound was also a challenge. "It was easy to find the table of byte sequences used to generate sounds, but problematic to determine what those bytes controlled," recalls Horowitz. "Many new sounds we created came from trial and error – I'd plug in different values to different positions of the table and listen for changes." As for graphics, Horowitz says the team had no tools for creating graphics or animation: "Someone had the great idea to use a Lite-Brite," he grumbles. This Hasbro toy enables you to create 'glowing' pictures by pushing coloured pegs through black paper into a grille. On turning on the toy's light, you see your image. "Each row is offset horizontally from its neighbour, and so can't be used to simulate a 16x16 grid."

"Oh, the Lite-Brite," laughs Golson. "You'd cover the front with construction paper, to stop light leaking, but when you moved a peg you'd have a hole leaking white light!" His solution was to cover purple pegs in black marker and use them as blockers, and to use every other line in the hexagonal field to emulate the 16x16 grid that *Crazy Otto* characters required. "Finally, I put a sheet of white paper over the front as a diffuser – standing across the room, squinting a bit, I could test my character design!"



Horowitz's solution was simpler: graph paper. And he recalls that the Lite-Brite wasn't the only problem the team had with *Crazy Otto*'s graphics: "The character ROMs required an arcane algorithm. As I recall, each 16x16 was cut up into eight 4x8 sections and then each vertical pair made up one nybble in the ROM. So after each design, we still had to hand-code each image into the correct sequence of bytes."



» [Arcade] The first cartoon intermission finds Crazy Otto and a female counterpart fleeing monsters. When the two bipedal Pac-people meet, it's love at first sight.



Crazy Otto's development wasn't entirely straightforward, then; luckily, though, the effort didn't go to waste. Towards the end of testing, machines were put into local arcades. "We were extremely pleased with the results – *Crazy Otto* significantly outperformed *Pac-Man* and players loved the changes we'd made," remembers Macrae. It was during this period that the infamous *Time* shot was snapped (see '*Crazy Otto*'s accidental debut'). Encouraged by early testing, the team travelled to Chicago to meet with Midway for discussions about having it build the game. However, this wasn't entirely through choice, and was, in fact, the result of a convoluted legal battle that had eventually turned into an uneasy alliance. "*Super Missile Attack* caught the attention of Atari, who sued GCC for copyright infringement. We thought we were in the right, because we hadn't 'copied' anything – we'd only added new code," explains Horowitz.

GCC decided to fight, despite lacking the myriad lawyers that Atari had at its disposal. "They asked for $15 million in damages – if dropping out of school to write games was fun, so was being sued in federal district court by the world's premier games company," jokes Golson. Work continued on *Crazy Otto* throughout the hearings, depositions and negotiations, and, according to Golson, Atari eventually realised that GCC wasn't going to give up, had a strong legal position, was causing a PR nightmare for Atari, and was going to continue designing games anyway, and so GCC may as well design them for Atari. "They dropped the lawsuit and contracted us to write games for them, by which point the *Pac-Man* kit was ready to go," says Golson.

As part of its contract with Atari, GCC had permission to develop and sell kits, but only with approval from the original manufacturers. Presumably, Atari thought that no one would give GCC permission to release its kits, but *Crazy Otto* was waiting impatiently for release. Cue: Kevin Curran cold-calling Dave Marofske, president of Midway. "He said something like, 'You may have seen Atari abandoned the lawsuit. Our kits are legal. We've got a kit for *Pac-Man* that we're bringing to market. Let's sit down and talk out our differences," laughs Golson. "Now, Dave's having a terrible time with counterfeit *Pac-Man* games and merchandise. He's in court all the time. So having someone call him up… 'Why, that's nice of you! Sure, come on out to Chicago and bring your game. Let's talk!'"

> **"Kevin Curran called the president of Midway and said, 'Atari abandoned the lawsuit. Our kits are legal. Let's talk'"**
>
> GCC proves that fortune favours the bold

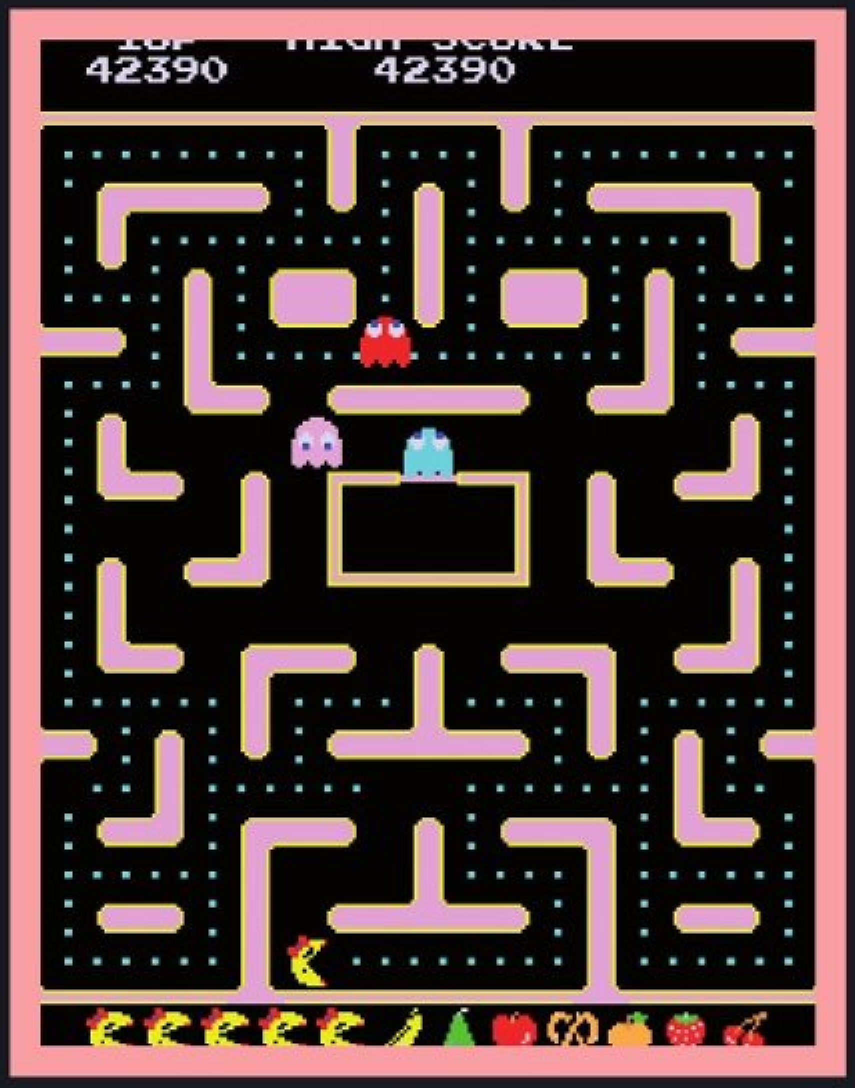
Midway liked *Crazy Otto* and bought the rights. Deciding to release it as a new game, changes were demanded to make it a more obvious sequel to *Pac-Man*. The first thing to go was Otto, along with monsters Plato, Darwin, Freud and Newton. "Midway were paying, so we didn't mind. We liked Crazy Otto with his legs and the cool monsters with antennae and blue shoes, but using the original Pac-Man and ghosts made sense," says Golson. An early revision saw *Crazy Otto* rebranded *Super Pac-Man*, but Macrae recalls that Midway became enamoured with Horowitz's intermissions. "They saw the 'love affair' animations and suggested they

PIXEL PORN

THE INTERMISSION ANIMATIONS that run throughout *Ms. Pac-Man* follow a basic love story: Ms. Pac-Man and Pac-Man meet, they fall in love in that common 8-bit whirlwind romance style – no cut-scene movies back then – and they then have a baby. Observant readers might notice there's a step missing. "Unlike the first two animations, the third, 'Junior', required new graphics – a flying stork, the bundle, and Jr. Pac-Man," recalls Horowitz. "As a placeholder, I made a 'they f**k' animation. Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man were at the lower-left of the screen, facing each other, with mouths opening and closing. We all thought it was pretty funny, and it stayed in the game until we put in the actual – and still a bit unfinished – 'Junior' animation."

A little later, Kevin Curran and Doug Macrae were on a flight to Chicago to meet with Midway, and Horowitz casually let slip about the ROMs they were carrying: "Uh oh, I'm not sure if those ROMs have the right third animation." Curran freaked out so badly that Horowitz had to immediately reassure him that he was just kidding, and that the ROMs did indeed have the clean 'Junior' animation.

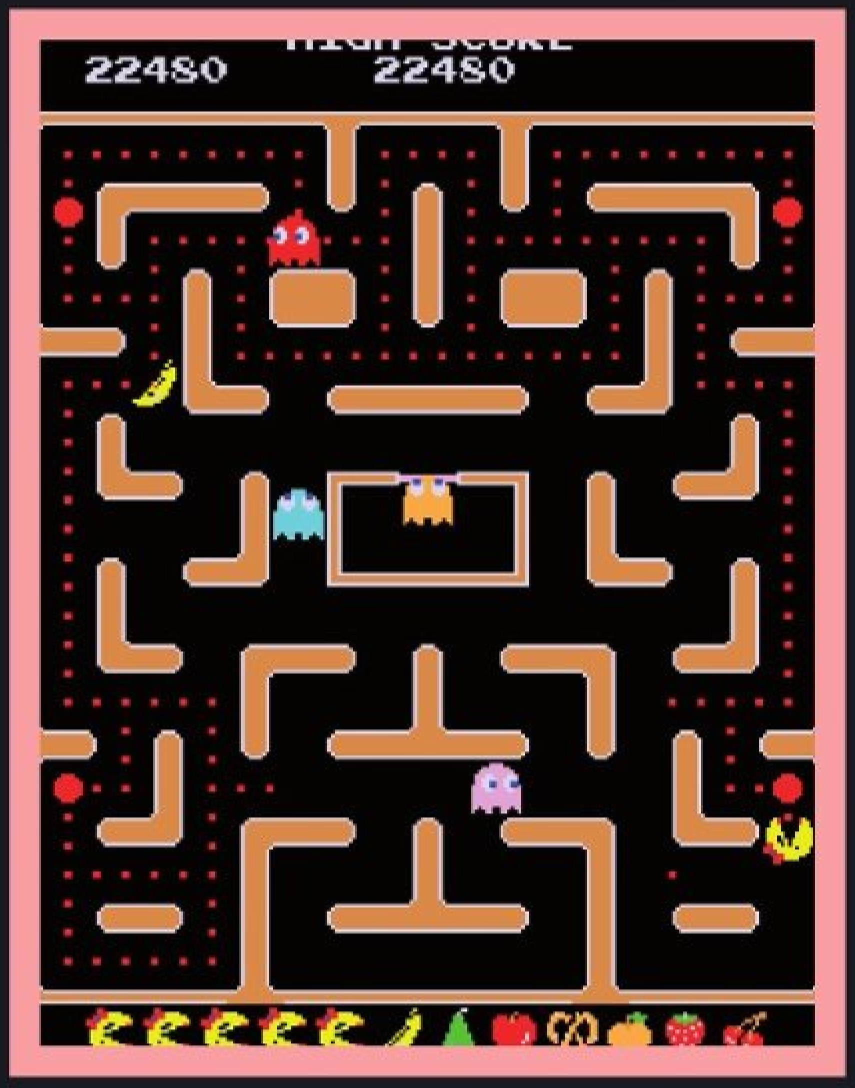
» [Arcade] After round 13, the mazes alternate between the third and fourth ones, but they're coloured lilac and pink rather than orange and dark blue.

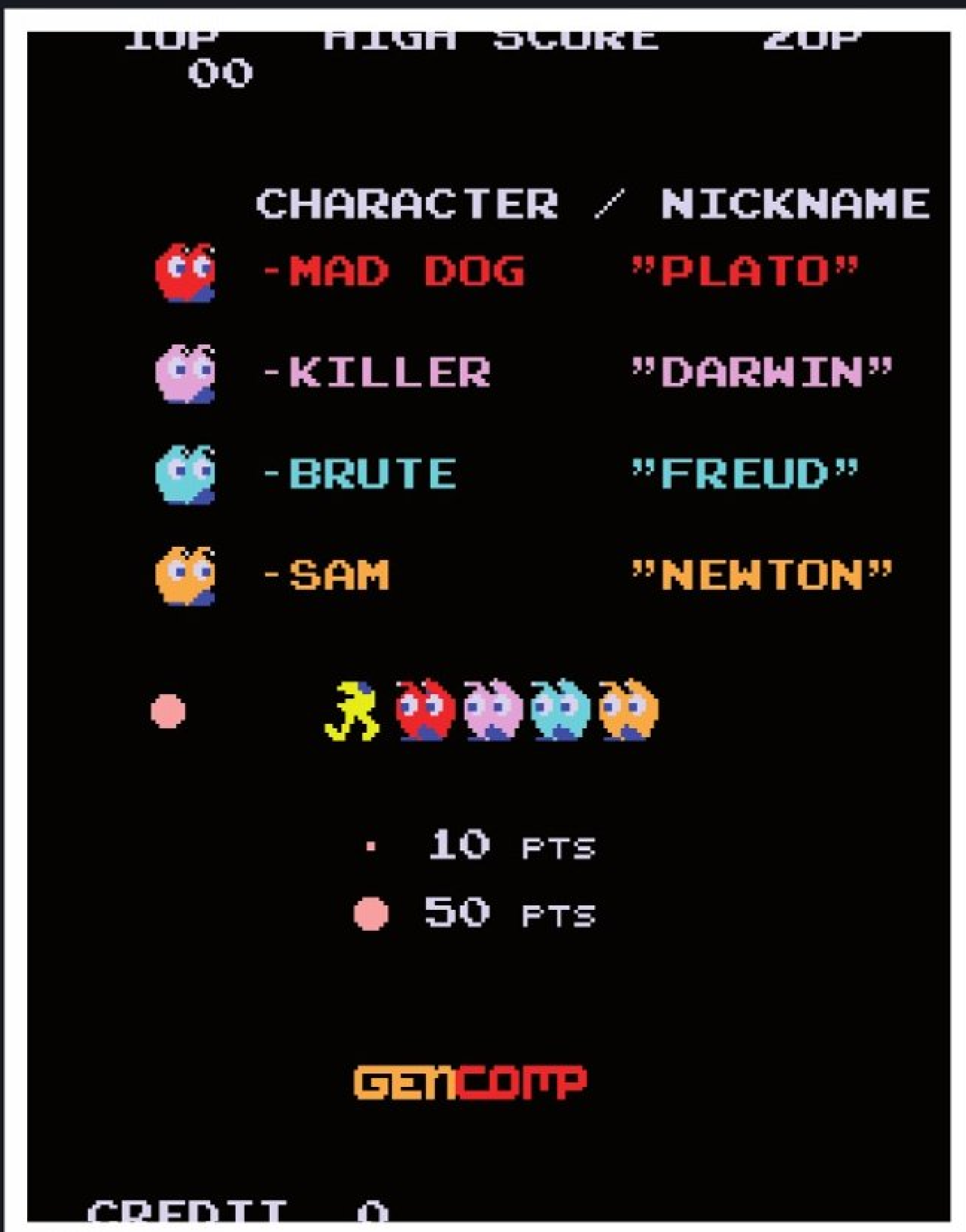


» [Arcade] Scared ghosts flee from a powered-up Ms. Pac-Man.



» [Arcade] The improved algorithms for the ghosts' behaviour in *Ms. Pac-Man* made defeat a much more likely outcome for even the best players.







» [Arcade] A pretty good example of how not to play *Ms. Pac-Man*, unless you enjoy watching her get clobbered.



» [Arcade] Ghosts in hot pursuit of Ms. Pac-Man, although they're in for a shock when she munches the power pellet.

» As with *Pac-Man*, *Crazy Otto* had character names. Also, note the 'GenComp' logo. This remains in the final *Ms. Pac-Man* graphics ROM, but is never displayed.

should star Pac-Man and a female Pac-Man, with the end of the third intermission resulting in 'Junior'." And so *Super Pac-Man* became '*Pac-Woman*', and then '*Miss Pac-Man*', until, according to Golson, "someone realised that, hey, she has a baby, so we can't call her 'Miss'."

Ms. Pac-Man stuck as the final name and grew into a brand almost as big as *Pac-Man* itself. "At the time we thought it a better marketing ploy to go for a female Pac-Man rather than a brand new character," says Horowitz. "And it's impossible to know, but I think using 'Ms.' instead of 'Miss' was a positive factor in the game's success." Horowitz recalls that Midway was also hands-off regarding the character design, and so many iterations were tried before the team settled on the final look: "For a while, she even had flowing red hair!"

Ironically, the 'family' animations that Midway liked so much led to short-lived legal wrangling that became the project's sole sour note – although Macrae clarifies that this has been blown out of proportion in various accounts. "The legal dispute was primarily over future licensing rights regarding the family created in the intermissions. And it wasn't with Namco, but with Bally/Midway," he explains. "It was eventually settled via new agreements that defined how we'd get paid on future games and properties. As part of this agreement, Midway licensed the next of our sequels, *Jr. Pac-Man*, which did reasonably well. And our rights in *Ms. Pac-Man* were never 'turned over' to Namco – to this day, we get paid royalties for *Ms. Pac-Man*."

The fact that royalties are still rolling in for *Ms. Pac-Man* shows what an enduring game it has been. From 8-bit micros to modern TV games and iOS devices, *Ms. Pac-Man* remains hugely popular. "In hindsight, I don't find it surprising that *Ms. Pac-Man* became the bestselling of all of the '*Pac*' family of games, and one of the bestselling games of all time," says Macrae. "The game was a careful blend of *Pac-Man* with advances that made it more exciting and challenging. *Pac-Man* is a great game; *Ms. Pac-Man* is even better."

Horowitz and Golson are a little more surprised regarding how things turned out for their game. "When we put *Crazy Otto* into local arcades, there was a crowd around it the entire time, and we knew it had an initial 'wow' factor, but I don't think I had any notion of it being a hit until I saw an actual *Ms. Pac-Man* cabinet on location at a different arcade," says Horowitz. "As an add-on, I don't think it would have made such a splash, but in its own cabinet, and with an immediate appeal to the then-untapped female market, it felt like it could be very successful." Even so, he wasn't prepared for how huge the game would become. "And I don't think anyone back then could have predicted that *Ms. Pac-Man* would still be relevant in 2010," he adds, finding the new wave of interest in the old title a great surprise. "We were just engineers doing what engineers do: fixing obvious flaws in an existing design, making a popular game even better."

His thoughts are echoed by Golson: "We knew we had a fun game, but even in 1981 we had no idea what a big deal it would be. But by mid-1982, we were flying high with our 'secret' Atari contract and the hottest arcade game in the USA – boy, was that a good feeling! And to see all the licensed merchandise was a hoot! But we had no idea it would be such a big hit."

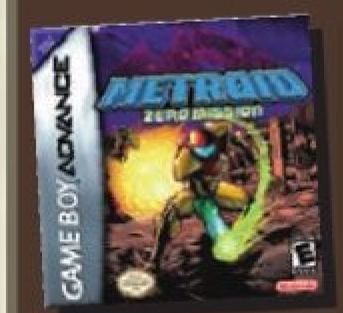
Macrae, Golson and Horowitz all remain thrilled about the longevity of their creation. "I think for a serious games player, the randomness in *Ms. Pac-Man* still makes the game interesting, right from the first rack," says Golson. "It has the right balance of difficulty and fun gameplay, starting out easy for the beginner and getting harder at just the right rate." We leave the final word to Horowitz – what are his thoughts about having worked on *Ms. Pac-Man*, as it approaches its 30th anniversary? "I was, am, and always will be proud of *Ms. Pac-Man*. We changed enough – but not too much – of *Pac-Man* to make it a wonderfully fun game to play."

Special thanks to Steve Golson for tireless enthusiasm, photography and scanning.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** Game Boy Advance
- **Year Released:** 2004
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Nintendo R&D1
- **Key People:** Yoshio Sakamoto (Director) Kenji Yamamoto (Composer)
- **Buy it for:** £20+

GO DEEPER

- **A remake of *Super Metroid* was pitched, but Yoshio Sakamoto was keen to revisit the original**
- **Sakamoto is the only member of the original NES team who worked on *Metroid: Zero Mission***



01. METROID: ZERO MISSION

With Nintendo preparing to unleash a brand new Metroid, we take a look back at its amazing handheld reboot of the original NES classic

THE BACKGROUND

The concept of *Metroid: Zero Mission* first began life in 2002 after Nintendo's R&D1 team had just wrapped up *Metroid Fusion*. Considering the possibility of another *Metroid* project, one team member suggested *Super Metroid*, which made perfect sense thanks to the Game Boy Advance and SNES sharing very similar architecture.

Director Yoshio Sakamoto had other ideas, however, and wanted to remake the original NES adventure. Due to concerns that its recent release was a departure from the series, Sakamoto decided to give players that were new to the series a proper taste of what the classic franchise was originally like.

Metroid: Zero Mission made its first official appearance at E3 in 2003. It was initially expected to link to the incoming version of *Metroid Prime II: Echoes* (as *Metroid Fusion* and the original *Metroid Prime* had done) but Sakamoto revealed that the time delay between the two games meant it was no longer possible.

Eventually released in 2004, *Metroid: Zero Mission* followed the typical trend of *Metroid* releases by selling less in its home country than it did abroad. While criticised by some for its short length (it can be completed in roughly six hours), it nevertheless went on to achieve high scores and many gamers and websites have since gone on to regard it as the best 2D *Metroid* in the series.

THE GAME

The first thing that strikes you about *Zero Mission* is just how gorgeous it looks. Backgrounds are meticulously detailed and brimming with the same atmosphere that made *Super Metroid* such a joy to explore. While the original NES outing was a somewhat barren affair, Nintendo R&D1 introduced plenty of flora and added more personality to the vicious fauna that can be found on the huge world.

Things of note



Cut-scenes

Zero Mission features beautiful cut-scenes that not only look fantastic, but give the player far greater insight into Samus's Chozo upbringing – something that isn't really discussed in the original NES game.



The original classic

If even the GBA is far too new for your tastes then you'll be delighted to learn that the original NES classic is included in its entirety. Once you've completed the game on any difficulty level, simply go to the options.



The big reveal

Perhaps the cleverest aspect of *Zero Mission* is the one thing we're most reluctant to talk about for fear of ruining it for you. All we'll say is that once Mother Brain is completed you'll be in for a pleasant surprise…



Link me do

It was possible to link *Metroid Fusion* to *Metroid Prime* in order to unlock extras. Although this wasn't possible on *Zero Mission* you could link it to another GBA playing *Fusion* to get some new *Fusion* artwork.



Suited & booted

Initially you'll simply unlock and gain access to all the weapons that appeared in the original *Metroid*. As you continue to explore the huge planet of Zebes, however, you'll gain access to even more useful items.



» [GBA] Although the new bosses you fight aren't exactly taxing to defeat, they're still fun to fight against.





» [GBA] The Ice Beam is an extremely handy weapon that freezes enemies and enables Samus to use them as platforms.

What the press thought



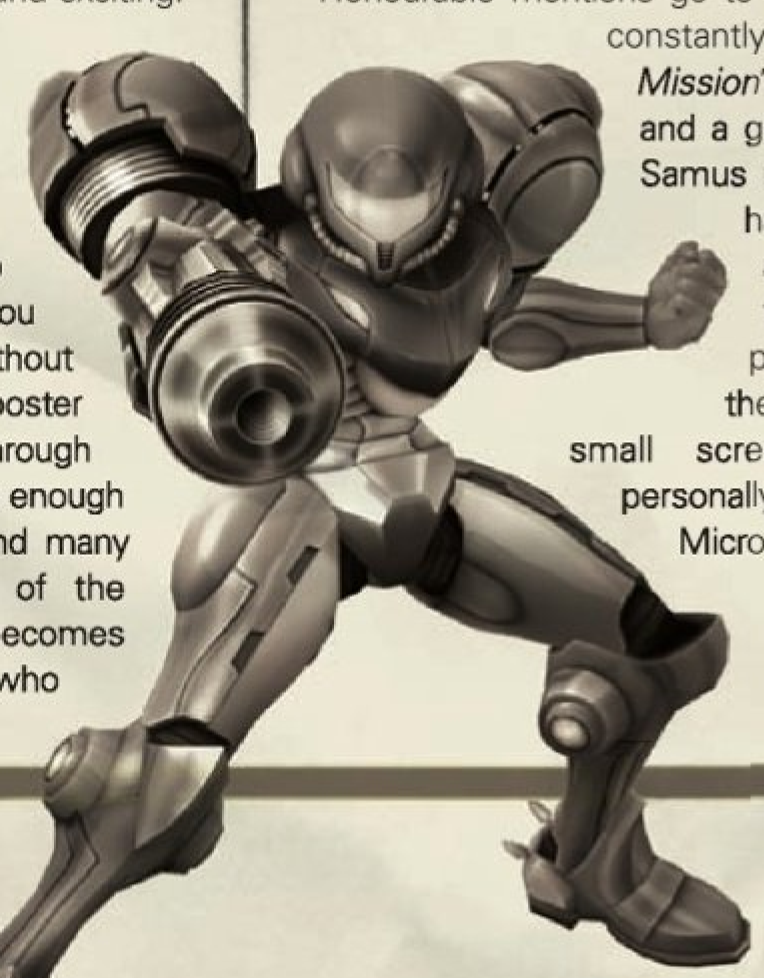
games™
Score: 8/10
"Another superb addition to the GBA library that will appeal to platform fans and *Metroid* veterans alike"



1UP
Score: 9/10
"It is quite possibly the most ambitious, comprehensive and successful remake ever attempted for a game of this type."

Zebes is certainly a diverse planet, with each area featuring distinct locations that really drive home the feeling of exploring a strange foreign world. Secrets are hidden away in the most unlikely of places and you'll need all your skills in order to discover every last one. Add in some truly evocative music that is every bit as menacing as the tunes found in *Super Metroid* and the end result is a massive aesthetic update that instantly recalls nostalgia for the 8-bit original, but somehow makes everything feel fresh and exciting. No small feat.

Another improvement to the original *Metroid* is the addition of the many new weapons and items that Samus can collect. The Power Grip is a very handy device that enables you to grab onto ledges, the Gravity Suit enables you to move through any environment without being slowed down, while the Speed Booster is a handy dash attack that will break through certain objects once Samus has built up enough speed. The addition of these items and many more greatly change the structure of the original game, but not so much that it becomes completely unrecognisable to anyone who played the original. And don't worry, all of Samus's core items and weapons like the Maru Mari and Ice Beam are still available and are still used to solve exactly the same puzzles as before (in addition to a few new ones).



Several new bosses also make an appearance in *Zero Mission*, and while they're not quite as inventive as the mayors that appear in *Metroid Fusion*, each and every one is extremely satisfying to battle. Honourable mentions go to a huge centipede that constantly harries you in *Zero Mission*'s opening half hour, and a gross lava monster that Samus must avoid by using a handy zip-line, but each and every one lingers in the memory and looks particularly fantastic on the Game Boy Advance's small screen (although we'd personally recommend a GBA Micro for the best effect).

Add in plenty of extras like a Time Trial mode, the ability to replay the game on several difficulty levels – a first for the series – the option to link up to *Metroid Fusion* and the original NES classic and *Metroid: Zero Mission* becomes the best 2D *Metroid* we've ever played. That's right, we actually prefer it to the already stunning SNES classic.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

We'll admit that choosing a reboot of a proven classic is cheating ever so slightly, but what better way to know that this will still be revered in a decade's time? Everything about *Zero Mission* is structured beautifully, constantly introducing you to new items and then giving you the relevant areas and bosses with which to best utilise them. Of course, it helps that the core structure has been in place for 18 years, but what impresses here is just how well Sakamoto and the rest of his team have integrated the new items and levels into the core game. It's all fitted together so flawlessly that you'd swear it had always been in there from the very beginning. Add in a final third that enables you to play *Metroid* in a whole new way and *Zero Mission* cements itself as a cast iron epic adventure that may be short in stature but is a journey you'll want to return to time and time again.



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iTUNES SEARCH: HOW IT WORKS



iTUNES SEARCH: LINUXUSER



iTUNES SEARCH: TOTAL 911



iTUNES SEARCH: PLAY MAGAZINE



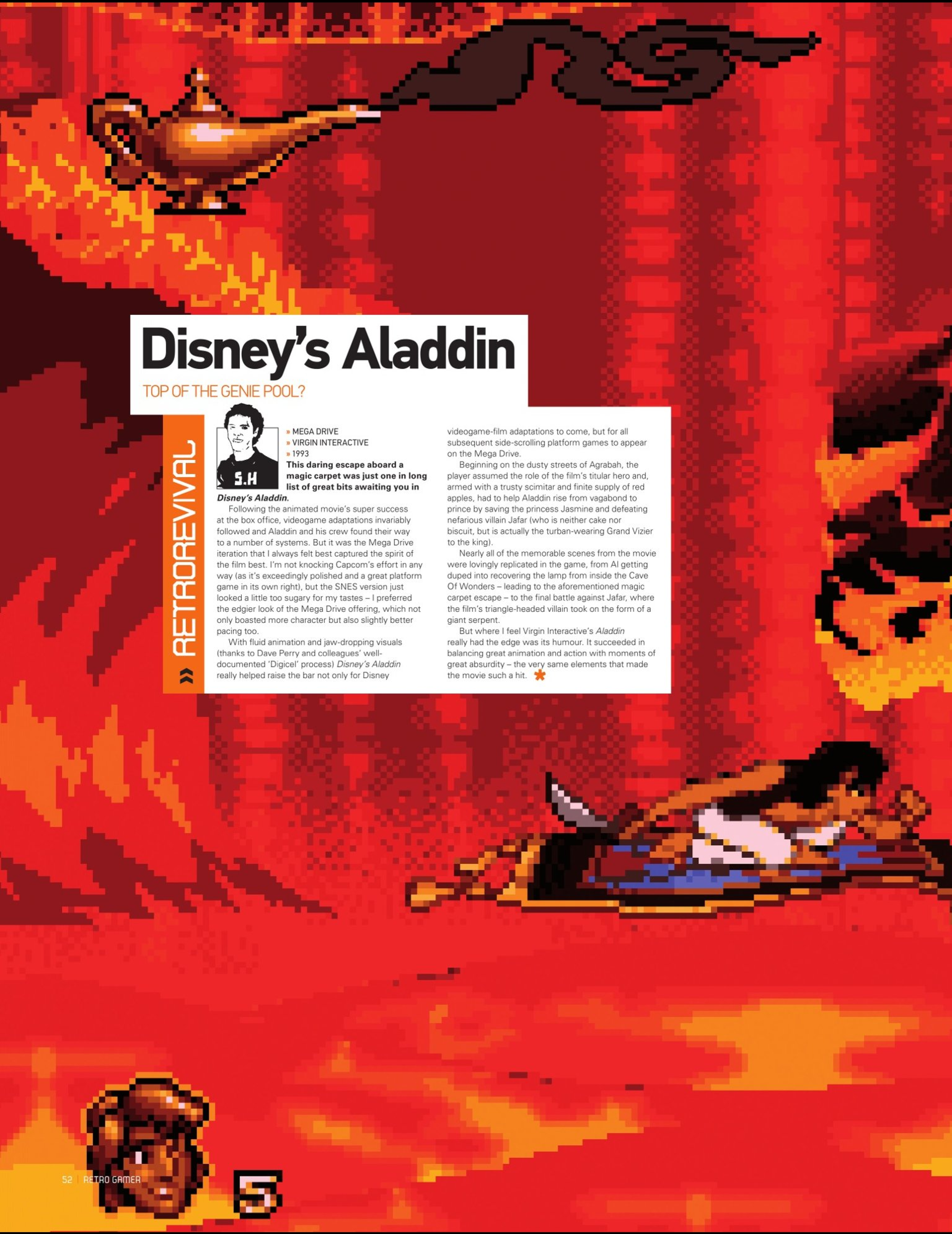
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Disney's Aladdin

TOP OF THE GENIE POOL?

» RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE
» VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
» 1993

This daring escape aboard a magic carpet was just one in long list of great bits awaiting you in *Disney's Aladdin*.

Following the animated movie's super success at the box office, videogame adaptations invariably followed and Aladdin and his crew found their way to a number of systems. But it was the Mega Drive iteration that I always felt best captured the spirit of the film best. I'm not knocking Capcom's effort in any way (as it's exceedingly polished and a great platform game in its own right), but the SNES version just looked a little too sugary for my tastes – I preferred the edgier look of the Mega Drive offering, which not only boasted more character but also slightly better pacing too.

With fluid animation and jaw-dropping visuals (thanks to Dave Perry and colleagues' well-documented 'Digicel' process) *Disney's Aladdin* really helped raise the bar not only for Disney videogame-film adaptations to come, but for all subsequent side-scrolling platform games to appear on the Mega Drive.

Beginning on the dusty streets of Agrabah, the player assumed the role of the film's titular hero and, armed with a trusty scimitar and finite supply of red apples, had to help Aladdin rise from vagabond to prince by saving the princess Jasmine and defeating nefarious villain Jafar (who is neither cake nor biscuit, but is actually the turban-wearing Grand Vizier to the king).

Nearly all of the memorable scenes from the movie were lovingly replicated in the game, from Al getting duped into recovering the lamp from inside the Cave Of Wonders – leading to the aforementioned magic carpet escape – to the final battle against Jafar, where the film's triangle-headed villain took on the form of a giant serpent.

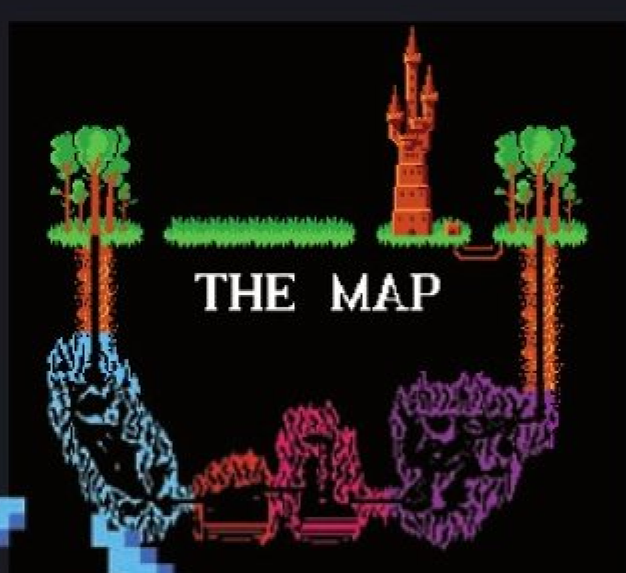
But where I feel Virgin Interactive's *Aladdin* really had the edge was its humour. It succeeded in balancing great animation and action with moments of great absurdity – the very same elements that made the movie such a hit. *

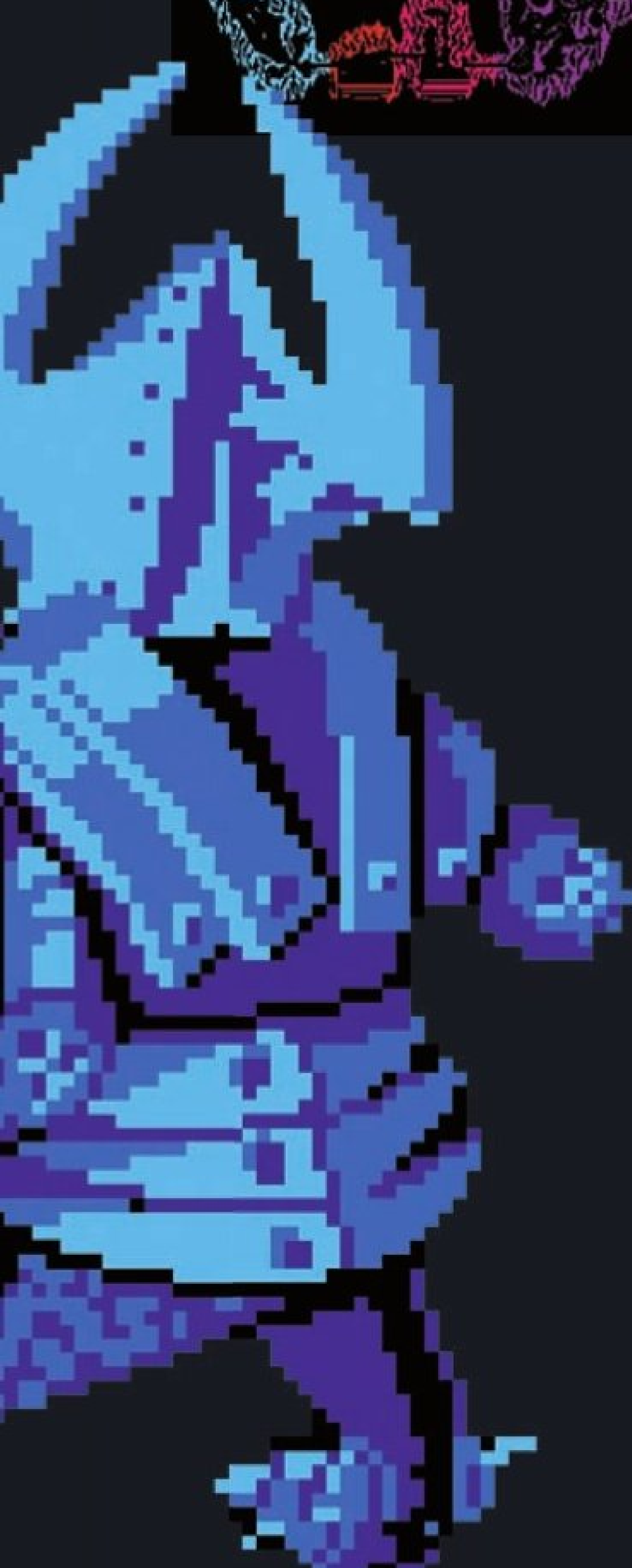

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The History Of WIZARDS & WARRIORS



More than 20 years ago, Manchester's Pickford brothers moved from computers to consoles when they were asked to develop what would become the second game in Rare's Wizards & Warriors trilogy. Ste Pickford helps **Retro Gamer** reflect on a franchise that began and ended on the NES





When it comes to videogame trilogies, the NES provided gamers with some of the most memorable. Mario and the Belmont clan are still going strong after carving out their names in Nintendo's three iconic *Super Mario Bros.* games and Konami's trio of classic *Castlevania*s. Even NES favourite *Ninja Gaiden* made a long-awaited return to the console scene in 2004 with an Xbox adventure, 13 years after Ryu Hayabusa sliced and diced his way through the last of three incredibly challenging NES games from Tecmo.

Often forgotten among this list of NES trilogy heroes is Kuros, the valiant knight who first hefted his blade in Rare Ltd.'s *Wizards & Warriors*, published by Acclaim in North America in 1987, although Europe had to wait until 1990 to play it. Kuros returned to North America in 1989 in the challenging *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II*, which was released in Europe two years later. And after starring in the curiously named *The Fortress Of Fear: Wizards & Warriors X* for Game Boy in 1990, a North America-only release, the armour-clad hero closed out the NES trilogy with *Wizards & Warriors III – Kuros: Visions Of Power*, released in North America in 1992, and Europe the following year.

But Kuros has never been seen since. Gamers can only imagine his armour collecting dust in a closet somewhere while rats make a home in his discarded helmet.



The *Wizards & Warriors* trilogy was among more than 60 NES games, including *Cobra Triangle*, *RC Pro-Am* and *Battletoads*, developed or produced by the Twycross, Leicestershire-based Rare, the legendary game development company founded by brothers Tim and Chris Stamper. While Rare developed the first *Wizards & Warriors* in-house, the company hired computer game developer Zippo Games – founded by another pair of brothers, John and Ste Pickford – for the two sequels.



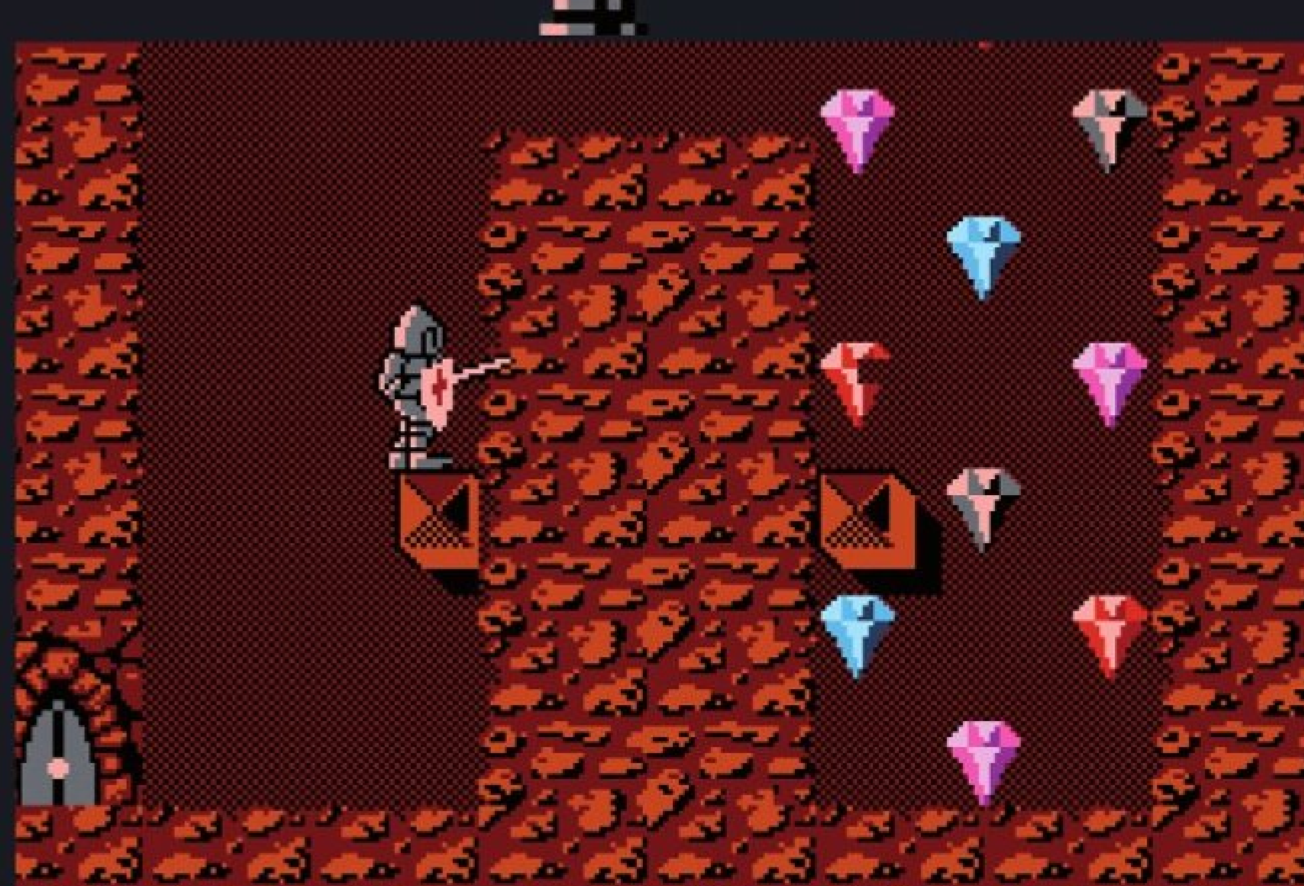
IronSword would be the first of several NES games Zippo would develop for Rare. However, having just come off creating *Cosmic Pirate*, a game published in Europe by Palace Software for the Amiga and Atari ST in 1988 (and the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum the following year), the NES was a machine that was rather alien to Zippo, and most of Europe at the time, Ste Pickford tells **Retro Gamer**.

"We came to see Rare and they liked what we did, and we were impressed with the quality of their games and the NES software in general, although initially it seemed like a step backwards because, like many European developers, we were caught up in the technical and cosmetic aspects of the 16-bit machines: 16-colour graphics, hi-res displays et cetera," Pickford says. "The NES seemed primitive by comparison, sub-Commodore 64. But the games were ten times better than everything being released for home computers, which we appreciated, and we wanted to try to make games as good as that. Rare showed us *Wizards & Warriors* and asked us to develop the sequel, and pretty much left us to it."

Rather unsurprisingly for a title created in the 1980s, the game that Zippo staff were shown concerned the plight of an abducted princess. According to the instruction manual, her captor, Malkil, was a wizard who had "gone mad with age, and turned his powerful magic to the dark side."

From the decidedly medieval and nicely presented opening theme to the final battle with Malkil, Kuros's first adventure was a unique experience for NES gamers in 1987, and technically well ahead of other games for the console at the time.

Wizards & Warriors incorporates platforming action and a heavy emphasis on treasure-hunting; more secrets than Kuros can shake his sword at, in fact. In each of the eight stages, Kuros must enter the door manned by the 'Guardian Knight', who asks that the hero collect a certain number of gems



» [NES] Kuros has an appetite for riches throughout the series.



to pass through. Thus, Kuros must scour each stage for gems, as well as colour-coded keys that help him progress. Along the way, Kuros can find treasure chests containing items to upgrade his attack, defence and movement. Treasure fiends will appreciate the invisible doors that usually lead to hoards of gems. Seven of the eight stages finish with a boss fight, including a giant spider and a wraith, and Kuros rescues seven 'damsels' before he finally tracks down that archetypical princess. Evidently, the mad wizard has a thing for the ladies.

However, Kuros is not the typical sword-wielding hero; veterans of the series will know that a swing of the sword is not always the best method of attack. Kuros can kill enemies just by holding his weapon in place while jumping or standing still, and with the help of a special item, he can even kill foes with his boots.



The major gripe that most gamers have with the original *Wizards & Warriors* is that it's too easy. Most of the time, the use of the continue feature will start Kuros off right where he perished. To boot, continues are unlimited.

However, *IronSword* would correct this problem.

In fact, Pickford thinks Zippo's first NES effort might have been a touch too challenging.

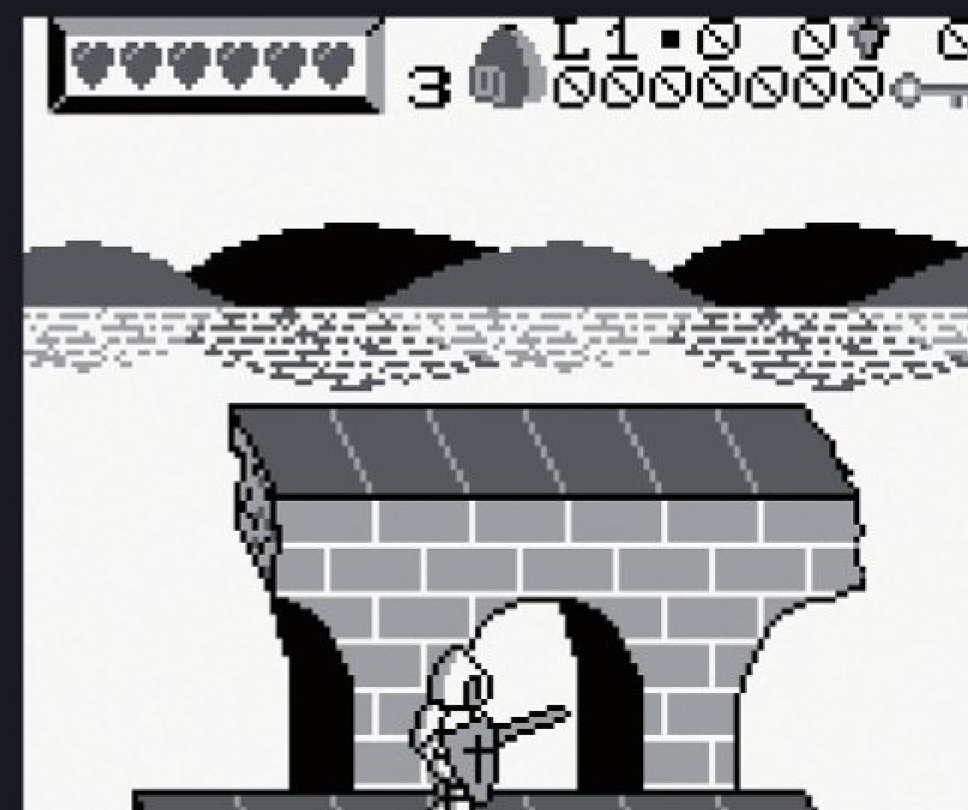
"I was relatively happy at the time, but looking back I don't think we really 'got' what Nintendo games were all about with our first attempt," he says. "[IronSword] was too difficult; we were still too much in the mode of home computer game developers, not console developers, so it's not a game I ever raved over. I guess I was most pleased that we finished it and got it approved and out on the shelves."

IronSword is not only much harder than the original, it ups the ante on graphics, sound and depth.

However, Pickford, who served as graphic artist and co-designer of the game – big brother John and Steve Hughes were the other designers – said there was still room for improvement.

"Console games were new to us at the time; this was our first attempt," he says. "We felt that the graphics in most NES games were poor, and thought we could do better, but I was learning the machine and its capabilities on this project, so I'm not sure the graphics were that great. But I was pleased with the eagle animation!"

Still, the game's colourful and detailed graphics are comparable to some of the best-looking NES games released around the same time, such as Capcom's *Strider* and the Compile-developed *Guardian Legend*. *IronSword* features lush, detailed environments, with Ice Fire Mountain and the second world's water cavern notable standouts. The characters and enemies not only look good, but creativity shines through in the menacing and deranged-looking blue demons found in world three's fiery cavern, and the bulbous-but-friendly Frog King of the second world. And Kuros's appearance changes with each weapon or armour upgrade, a rarity among games of the time.

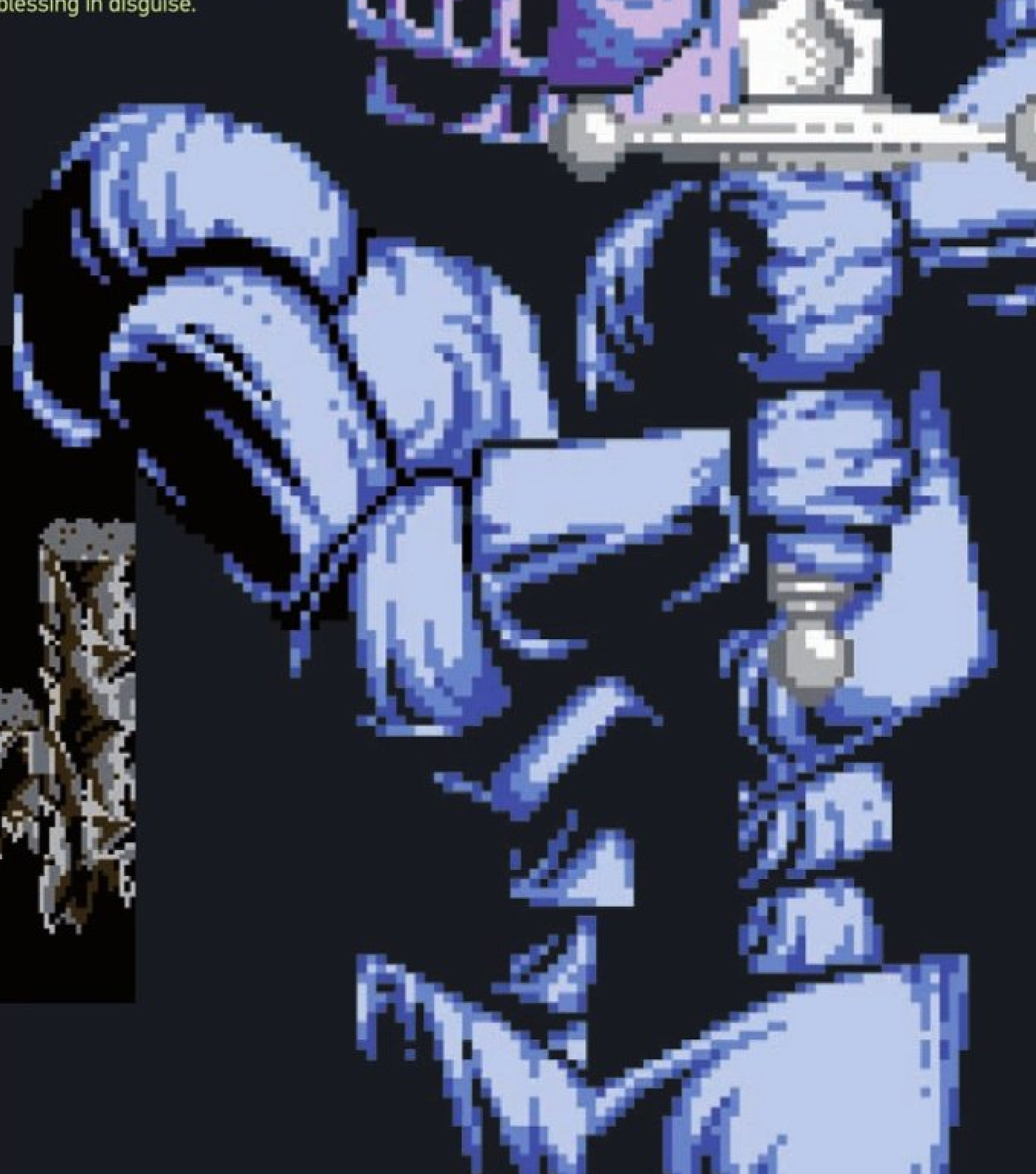


Not so good in green and black

■ One of the first third-party titles to appear on Nintendo's Game Boy after its US launch in 1989 was *Fortress Of Fear: Wizards & Warriors X*, published by Acclaim. What happened to chapters four to nine, we may never know.

Developed by Rare, the Game Boy version takes a much more linear approach than its NES counterparts, with five straightforward hack, slash and jump stages, divided into up to five parts each. Each stage finishes with a boss, many of whom make a return from the NES original.

Unfortunately, the Game Boy incarnation of the series is not nearly as enjoyable as the NES games. Like many first-generation Game Boy games, it's somewhat slow (but not nearly as slow as *Castlevania: The Adventure*), and it's also extremely difficult, much more so than even *IronSword*. There are many instant-death gaps to plunge into, the bosses are merciless and there are no continues. This game was never released in Europe, which might be a blessing in disguise.





» [NES] Like many of us might one day do, protagonist Malkil has "gone mad with age."

» [NES] *IronSword* introduces a shopkeeper to the series, but friendly faces are still few and far between.



» [NES] Four animal kings send Kuros on quests to retrieve their beloved treasures in *IronSword*.



» [NES] Many of the bosses in *IronSword* exude creativity.



But fans of retro games know that graphics aren't everything. Comprised of four realms, each divided into two parts, *IronSword* builds upon the adventure aspect of the original.

Malkil, as videogame villains are wont to do, returned for this sequel. This time, according to the instruction manual, "he's overtaken the four Elementals of nature: Wind, Water, Fire, and Earth."

Each of the four worlds naturally takes on the theme of one of the elements. Kuros must find the treasure sought by each realm's animal king that blocks the passage to the second part of the realm. For instance, in the first realm, our hero must find the Golden Egg and bring it to the Eagle King, who'll carry Kuros up to the second half of the realm, where the key is to find the magic spell that can defeat the Elemental guarding one of the four pieces of the *IronSword*. Upon assembling the *IronSword*, a final stage takes place on Ice Fire Mountain, where Kuros, now wielding the titular blade, does battle against the four elements. The triumphant music in the final stage is one of the best tunes to be heard on the NES.

"The music was all done by Rare's in-house musician [David Wise]," Pickford says, adding that he did a fantastic job on *IronSword*.

In regards to gameplay, *IronSword* introduces a shopkeeper to the series, who offers keys, roast chickens, as well as often expensive weapons and armour. *IronSword* contains more secret areas than the original, and many more treasures. Included are four cleverly hidden Relics of Sindarin, one in each world. While the treasures only provide the player with a heap of useless points – as the game doesn't save high scores – just having the luck or skill in finding them is rewarding enough. *IronSword* also introduces magic to the series, such as a familiar that transforms enemies into coins, and a spell that will force the shopkeeper to throw roast chickens at Kuros. Like the original, the chickens return energy to a weakened Kuros, but so do refreshing mugs of ale, which Kuros probably needs to steady himself for the fiendish foes he will undoubtedly face.



And while the first stage throws Kuros right into the fray, *IronSword* seems to get easier once the player earns spells and better armour and weapons. In fact, the level of challenge never really rises significantly until the final battle on Ice Fire Mountain. Unlike the original, passwords are included, so players don't have to beat the game in one sitting.

Despite having developed the original *Wizards & Warriors* in-house, Rare wasn't quick to stick its nose in when it came to Zippo's handling of the sequel, Pickford says.

"Rare gave us a lot of freedom," he explains. "I think they were quite picky about who they worked with. When they started looking for other developers to give NES work to, they interviewed quite a few companies, but at the time, I don't think they gave anybody any work but Zippo Games. So their vetting process was quite strict, but once they had decided that they wanted to give us some work, I think they also decided we were trustworthy enough to handle the project without a great deal of interference. We needed a fair amount of education about console games, Nintendo's policies and restrictions, the way the console business worked et cetera, which Rare provided. Outside of Rare and Software Creations, we were one of the earliest NES developers in Europe."



One of the stranger aspects of *IronSword* was its box art. For some reason, the game's publisher, the now-defunct New York-based Acclaim Entertainment, decided to hire Fabio Lanzoni – yes, the male model typically found on Eighties runways and the covers of romance novels – to portray Kuros. Without armour.

"That was something we always had a laugh about," Pickford says. "A game with a knight in shining armour has a photo of a bare-chested Conan lookalike on the cover?" "We used it as an example of the lack of imagination of Americans," he adds apologetically. "Tons of American games have photos, or photorealistic images on the cover, which almost never happened in Europe or Japan at the time. It seemed like Americans needed to see something absolutely realistic to be happy, and couldn't handle more expressive non-realistic images. I guess the reason for the cover was that a real suit of armour would have been too expensive to make or hire for the photo shoot!"

Whether or not Fabio's presence helped or hindered sales of the game will never be known, but *IronSword* managed to sell an impressive half a million cartridges in North America, plus another 50,000 copies in Europe.

Pickford might have even had more of a laugh if he had seen the North American commercials for the game. Acclaim's advert shows a boy in his room finishing off Malkil in the original game, when a Conan lookalike – not played by Fabio this time – bursts through the door, fresh off of slaying a

A is for Animation. Kuros was one of the most well-animated characters to hit the NES when he debuted in 1987.

B is for Buy. The first two games can be scooped up for a couple of quid, but *III* is pricier.

C is for Chicken. Roast chickens restore health to Kuros in all three games. Strangely, in *IronSword*, extra-large roasts hurt Kuros.

D is for Death. The Grim Reaper comes calling often in these games, especially *IronSword*. It wasn't the salmon mousse.

E is for Easy. Unlimited continues make the original *Wizards & Warriors* a less-than-challenging affair.

F is for a certain expletive. It's uttered often by players, with several variations, usually while Kuros is flailing in his death throes.

G is for Guild. The guilds in *Wizards & Warriors III* allow Kuros to take the guise of a knight, wizard or thief.

H is for Hughes. With all the talk of the Pickfords, we mustn't forget about Steve Hughes, who had a major hand in development.

I is for Invisible. The series features invisible doorways, a feature found in many Eighties games that usually lead to treasure.

J is for Jump. These games require platforming skills, and Kuros's jumping method is nothing short of unique.

K is for Kuros. The hero's face remains hidden behind his helmet until he dons new guises in *Wizards & Warriors III*.

L is for Ladies. In the original game, Kuros rescues no fewer than eight lovely women. Even Fabio is jealous.

M is for Malkil. Apparently, the wizard wreaks much havoc throughout the trilogy because he has gone "mad with age".

N is for North America. Despite being developed in England, all three games were released in North America first.

O is for Oblation. Kuros must present offerings, such as a golden fly, to the animal kings in *IronSword*.

P is for Pickford. John and Ste Pickford of Manchester were the lead developers of *Wizards & Warriors II* and *III*.

Q is for Quaff. Kuros regains life from mugs of ale in *IronSword*, the same game in which animals speak to him.

R is for Rare. The legendary Twycross-based company developed the first game in-house and oversaw production of the other two.

S is for Sequel. Eighteen years after the last game was released, *Wizards & Warriors IV* seems rather unlikely.

T is for Trilogy. In fact, the *Wizards & Warriors* trilogy can probably be considered Rare's first franchise.

U is for Underworld. A major locale of the third *Wizards & Warriors* is the underworld, a place thriving with dreadful creatures.

V is for Violence. While he does take part in a bit of chit-chat, Kuros spends most of his time killing.

W is for Wizard. The antagonist of the series is a wizard, but in the third game, Kuros can also become one.

X is for *Wizards & Warriors X: Fortress Of Fear*, the Game Boy instalment in the series, is best avoided.

Y is for Yomp. Kuros spends his time yomping through the first two games with his heavy armour and weapons.

Z is for Zippo Games. The Manchester firm, including Hughes and the Pickfords, developed *Wizards & Warriors II* and *III*.



From Zippo Games to Zee-3

■ Having begun their careers with the UK-based ZX Spectrum developer Binary Design, John and Ste Pickford founded Zippo Games in 1988, which developed such games as *Cosmic Pirate* and *Voodoo Nightmare* for home computers.

Soon, Zippo was asked to develop NES games for Rare, including *IronSword*, *Cabal* and *Solar Jetman*.

While *Wizards & Warriors III* was in development in the early Nineties, Rare purchased Zippo Games, dubbing it "Rare Manchester."

However, the Pickfords left Rare the following year and joined Software Creations, with which they led the teams that created such excellent SNES games as *Equinox*, the Nintendo-published *Tin Star*, and *Plok!*, one of the few games for which the Pickford brothers managed to retain the intellectual rights.

In 1996, the Pickfords founded Zed Two, creating the innovative puzzlers *Wetrix* for the N64 and *Wetrix+* for the Sega Dreamcast. A sequel followed in 2000, with the release of *Aquaqua* for the PS2.

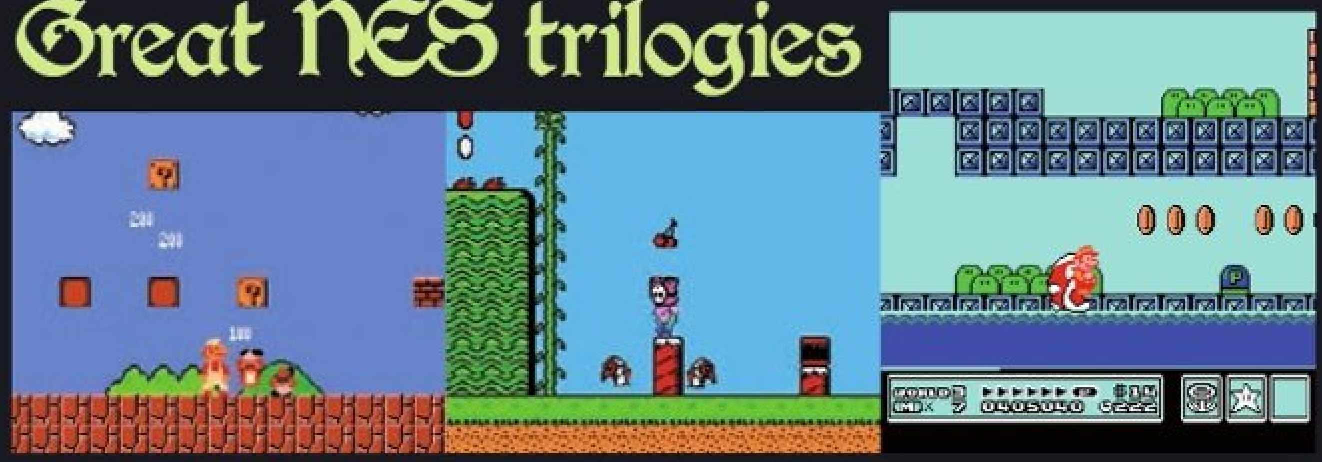
In late 2002, Zed Two was purchased by another Manchester-based developer, Warthog. Two years later, in a move that Ste Pickford says made little sense, Warthog closed down the Zed Two studio, merging it with their own, and laid off the Pickford brothers and several other Zed Two staff members.

One of the last games Zed Two developed was an action-packed RTS game called *Future Tactics: The Uprising*, published in 2004 by Crave Entertainment for the three major home consoles at the time: Gamecube, PS2 and Xbox.

After Zed Two's closure, the Pickfords decided to strike out on their own again, this time launching Zee-3, which publishes PC games through its website, **www.zee3.com**. The company's first effort was *Naked War*, a critically acclaimed turn-based two-player strategy game.

The brothers are currently working on *Art Of Soccer*, a football strategy game, and *Magnetic Billiards*, a game they call the "spiritual successor" to *Sticky Balls*, an addictive puzzler developed but unreleased near the end of the Zed Two days.

Great NES trilogies



Super Mario Bros.

■ The NES, and the gaming industry, owe much to the original *Super Mario Bros.*, which fuelled NES sales and put the industry back on its feet in North America when it was released in 1986. With a Japanese sequel considered too difficult for Western gamers, Nintendo reworked *Doki Doki Panic* into *Super Mario Bros. 2*. The excellent *Super Mario Bros. 3* was met with more anticipation than almost any other game since.

Castlevania

■ First released by Konami in 1987, Simon Belmont's whip-wielding exploits in the original *Castlevania* showcased some of the best graphics to hit the NES and introduced timeless tunes. *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* took a non-linear approach, while *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* returned to the series' roots, but with four playable characters, three times the number of stages and possibly the best graphics ever seen on the NES.



» [NES] Donning the guise of a wizard, the third game sees Kuros shedding his armour for the first time.



» [NES] *Wizards & Warriors III* features the best visual presentation in the series.



beast in the hallway, and hands the surprised boy a copy of the sequel. With unfinished business remaining outside the boy's room, Kuros then shouts, "Back vile beast!", and leaves. After playing the new game for a few seconds, undoubtedly for the benefit of consumers, the boy opens his door to see what mayhem might be ensuing in his home. To his surprise, he sees nothing but his dog, who strangely has smoke pouring from his back end.



Following strong sales and mostly positive reviews of *IronSword*, Zippo's next major project for Rare was *Solar Jetman: The Hunt For The Golden Warship*, an intergalactic scavenger hunt whose North American sales didn't live up to its glowing reviews. It fared better in Europe, where it was published by Nintendo rather than Tradewest, which had put out the American release.

In 1990, Zippo was handed the reins for *Wizards & Warriors III – Kuros: Visions Of Power*, which was released two years later.

While visually and acoustically similar, the third game in the series was very different from the first two. To start with, Kuros could now take the guise of a wizard and thief, as well as a knight.

"*Wizards & Warriors III* was more like a game that I really wanted to make," says Pickford, who was lead artist and co-designer with his brother on the third game. "*IronSword* was pretty much a straight sequel for a game dropped in our lap; we looked at it and tried to make a new version with some improvements. With *Wizards & Warriors III*, we'd been into the NES for quite a while. I'd played loads of NES games and seen the possibilities, and was particularly impressed with the scope of some of the RPGs. I wanted to make something along those lines; something a bit more ambitious and more complex, but not a stat-based clone of an existing RPG. We also had a larger team: two programmers as I recall [Hughes and Andy Miah], not one, and an extra artist [Lyndon Brooke]."

Fans of Nintendo's *Metroid* and the Hudson Soft-developed *Faxanadu* would do well do take a look at *Wizards & Warriors III*.

Not stage-based like its predecessors, *Wizards & Warriors III* allows for open-ended gameplay, with the world divided into three main realms – the city, the underworld and the palace – through which Kuros can travel back and forth with ease.

He must ultimately find four gems to unlock the final area where Malkil awaits, and as in *IronSword*, secret areas abound and money can be found in order to purchase items from shopkeepers.

Kuros's immediate goal is to gain the three levels of each the knight, wizard and thief classes. To do this, he must find the statues of the three different guilds in bronze, silver and gold. When each statue is found, Kuros can take tests of skill in the form of horizontal – or vertical – scrolling action stages, finishing with a boss. For instance, after finding the bronze thief statue, Kuros can visit the first-level thief's guild and take the test. Once passed, Kuros can become a first-level thief. Each level and class he gains enables him to gain a new ability, and usually progress to previously unreachable areas.



"I loved the character development ideas in *Wizards & Warriors III*, with the three disguises and the different abilities and





Adventures Of Lolo

■ Like *Wizards & Warriors*, Hal Laboratory's *Adventures Of Lolo* series pretty much died with the NES, although in Japan, where the series is called *Eggerland*, there have been a couple of releases for PC, the last in 2000. The NES series, which began in 1989, revolves around a blue ball with eyes, legs and arms who must use his wits and push blocks around to make his way through dozens of enemy-laden stages.

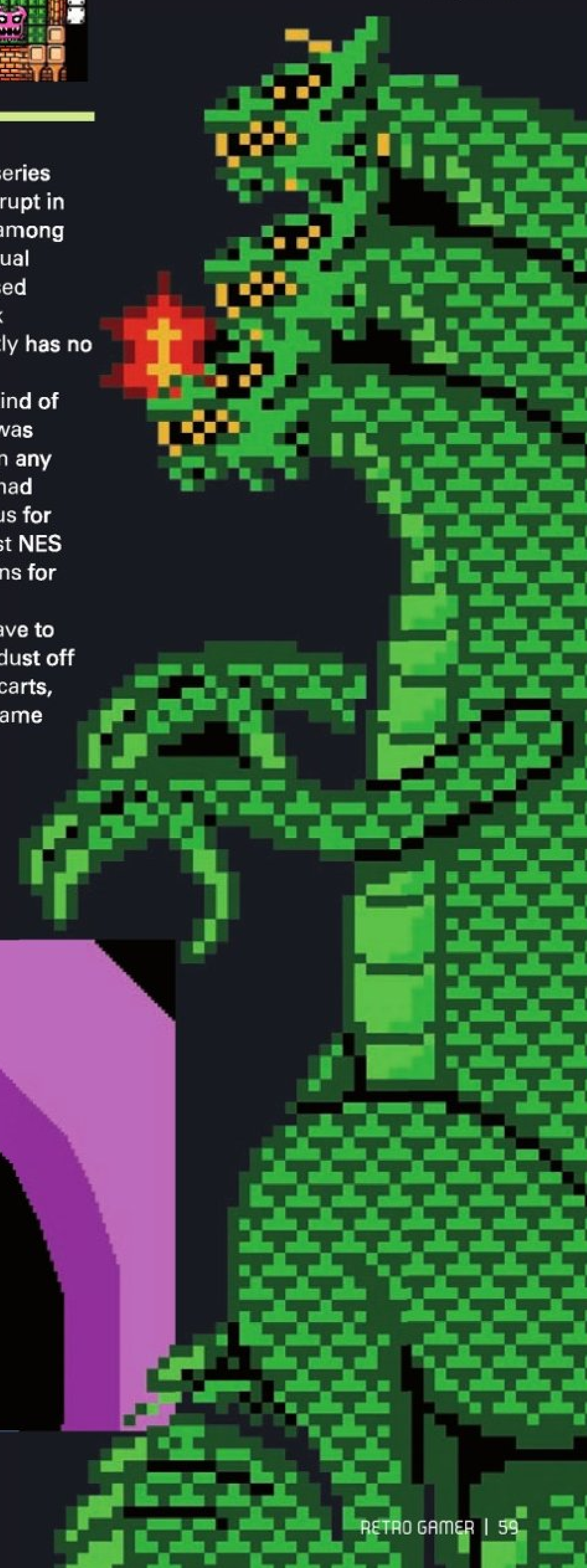


» [NES] Kuros rescues several damsels in *Wizards & Warriors* before finally reaching the elusive princess.

Ninja Gaiden

■ While many gamers yearn for the days when games weren't so easy to beat, Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* series is probably a little too tough. Ryu Hayabusa jumps and slashes his way through the games with great precision, but even the fantastic controls aren't enough to help the ninja win the day. While the first game, initially released in 1989, is beatable, the second and third games are exceedingly difficult.





» [NES] Like *IronSword*, *Wizards & Warriors III* includes some screen-filling bosses.

different areas of the map open to the different versions of the character, but these ideas are quite basic and 'old hat' nowadays," Pickford says.

Indeed, but back then, such games were few and far between.

Unfortunately for Zippo, with the game nearly finished, it was unable to see it to completion.

"Our studio was struggling at the time, and eventually we sold the studio to Rare and became Rare Manchester," Pickford says. "This didn't work, though. Rare was great to work with when we were in business with them, dealing with them on something like an even footing, but I feel they made very poor employers.

"Once we became their studio, things went sour and morale dropped like a stone. It wasn't long before everyone at Rare Manchester went their separate ways, before *Wizards & Warriors III* was complete. One of the programmers completed the game himself after the studio closed."

"I remember sending the final version of the game design for *Wizards & Warriors III* to Rare for approval – it was called 'Silversword' at that time – and the document came back with about two typos fixed, a new cover, and 'revised by Tim Stamper' in big letters on the title page, with all trace of myself or any of the Zippo Games names removed, so I guess Tim had a major role."

While *Wizards & Warriors III* is widely regarded as the best game in the series, and Pickford's favourite, sales didn't quite live up its prequel – likely due to the fact that the 16-bit consoles were already well-established – with 300,000 copies sold in North America and 30,000 scooped up in Europe.

Pickford says he looks back fondly at the two *Wizards & Warriors* games developed by his team, but adds that he does have regrets.

"I wish I'd done a better job on both games," he says. "On the first one, I wish I knew a bit more about console games before we started, and with the second one, I wish I'd had the opportunity to be involved right to the end and see the design completed as intended."

Gamers who defeat *Wizards & Warriors III* – the last NES game the Pickfords worked on – will find that Kuros's adventures take an improbable turn after he defeats Malkil, setting the stage for a sequel.

However, nearly 20 years later, there's still no sign of our brave knight.

Unfortunately, the fate of Kuros is not in the hands of the Pickfords, who today are still making games as founders of the indie-development firm Zee-3 Digital Publishing.

After *Wizards & Warriors* series publisher Acclaim went bankrupt in 2004, the three games were among more than 50 whose intellectual property rights were purchased by Toronto-based Throwback Entertainment, which currently has no plans for the licence.

"At the time, at Zippo we kind of felt that *Wizards & Warriors* was 'ours', " Pickford says. "Not in any legal way, but because Rare had handed the first one over to us for the sequel, and it was our first NES game, we had all sorts of plans for future versions."

For now, Kuros fans will have to be content with blowing the dust off the connectors on their NES carts, or finding that elusive little Game Boy title.

But with even *Kid Icarus* making a return after a 20-year absence, perhaps there is a glimmer of hope for *Wizards & Warriors* fans.



» [NES] The ending of *Wizards & Warriors III* sets the stage for a sequel that never was.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home



IN DEPTH

» *R-Type Leo* messes with convention by ditching the metallic greys of the earlier games. Sunglasses are definitely recommended.

» Irem introduced a new weapon in *Leo* called Force Bits. Surrounding each side of your ship, they fire in two directions and home in on enemies.

» Although they don't quite capture the imagination like the mayors from the original game, the many bosses in *R-Type Leo* are quite inventive.



R-TYPE LEO

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **Alongside *R-Type Tactics, R-Type Leo* is one of the boldest games in the franchise. After finding huge success with *R-Type* and *R-Type II*, Irem felt a need to experiment with the mechanics that have served the series so well over the past 23 years.**

While home games such as *Super R-Type* and *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* stuck with the original tried-and-tested formula – charge shot, the Force, oppressive-looking visuals – *R-Type Leo* took the series in a bold new direction.

The biggest difference to the core *R-Type* gameplay is the addition of a second player, which greatly changed how the game played. Unlike previous *R-Type* games, if you died you weren't transported to the beginning of a stage, but were instead allowed to instantly carry on fighting until you both ran out of lives. Playing on your own featured the same gameplay mechanics of old though, so a second player was definitely advised as it just made the game so much easier to play.

Not content with introducing a second player, Irem continued to meddle with its classic gameplay by getting rid of your nifty charge beam and dropping the Force, which is quite possibly one of the greatest power-up devices of all time. Irem instead introduced Force Bits, which could be fired forwards or backwards and detached to home in on and destroy nearby enemies. This attack requires the Bits to be recharged before they can be sent out again, meaning that a fair amount of strategy is needed to get the best out of your weapons.

If the new weapon mechanics and second player weren't enough to convince you that Irem felt the series needed refreshing, then the vivid pastel-coloured stages were definite proof. The day-glo colour design was a world away from the Giger-inspired biomechanical visuals of the first two *R-Types* and can be initially quite hard to stomach. Once you put away your prejudices of what an *R-Type* game should actually look and feel like, however, you soon begin to realise that *Leo* is a perfectly acceptable addition to the series and easily more enjoyable than Irem's rock-hard sequel, *R-Type II*.

While no concrete sales figures exist for *R-Type Leo*, Irem h§as stated in the past that it wasn't as successful as the first two *R-Type* games, which probably explains why it never received a home conversion. This in itself is a real pity, as *R-Type Leo* proves itself to be an important addition to the *R-Type* franchise and shows that going against the grain isn't always a bad thing.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

R-TYPE 1987

If you're going to play an *R-Type* on a home system then make sure it's the original. Getting everything right thanks to its iconic enemies, masterful power-up system and fantastic level design, it remains one of the greatest shmups of all time. It received a number of polished home conversions, from Master System to PC Engine.

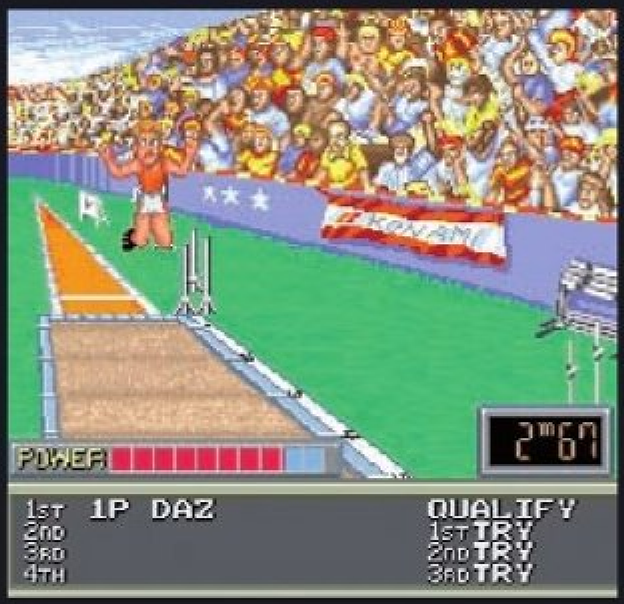
KONAMI '88

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Sports

■ **It's a shame that this wonderful little title from Konami never received a home release, as it's arguably the best game in the *Track & Field* series. Utilising the same hardware that Konami employed for *Chequered Flag*, it features wonderful cartoon-like visuals, extremely slick animation, and plenty of neat little scaling effects.**

Playing like a steroids-enhanced version of *Track & Field*, what impresses most about *Konami '88* – or *Hyper Sports Special* – is the sheer amount of variety that has been crammed into it. There are a total of nine events to compete in that range from the 100m Dash to Javelin and Skeet Shooting, and they all utilise the tried-and-tested three-button system that served the earlier games so well.

Considering that the Olympics took place that very year in Seoul, it seems strange that no home conversions were ever released, particular when you consider how good most of the home ports of *Hyper Sports* games actually were. While we'll never know Konami's reasons for this missed opportunity, the likes of MAME at least mean that gamers can still experience this slick sports title for themselves.



» [Arcade] There are some clever scaling effects in *Konami '88*, with the Long Jump being the most impressive.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

HYPER SPORTS 1984

Konami's previous sports game was ported to everything from the NES to the CPC, and they were all surprisingly good ports. Special mention should go to Jonathan Smith's superb Spectrum offering, as it effortlessly captures the excitement of Konami's hit coin-op.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

PENGO 1982

Released a year before *Dingo* hit arcades, *Pengo* remains a great maze game thanks to its clever layout designs, cute music and well-crafted gameplay mechanics. Unlike *Dingo*, it also received numerous ports to everything from the Atari 2600 to Sega's Mega Drive.



DINGO

■ **Developer:** Ashby Computers & Graphics ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Maze

■ **Although the Stamper brothers were best known for their wizardry on the Spectrum, they did occasionally dabble in the arcades. While the likes of *Battletoads* and *Killer Instinct* are well-known, this obscure offering from 1983 is equally worthy of your attention.**

Published by Jaleco and receiving a relatively limited release, *Dingo* is typical of Ultimate's output in its Spectrum period. It features bright, well-detailed sprites, wonderfully tight controls, and the whole package is polished to perfection.



» [Arcade] *Dingo* looks like any old maze game, but don't let appearances fool you, it's surprisingly good fun.

Gameplay-wise it's fairly simplistic, requiring you to navigate your way around a rather straightforward maze – which, like *Pac-Man*, never changes – and pick up all the fruit while avoiding numerous enemies. Picked fruit can be thrown at your foes to stun them for a relatively short time, but it's also possible for your antagonists to lob fruit back at you, meaning that you'll need a sharp eye and good reflexes to successfully complete it.

There's nothing in *Dingo* that you haven't already seen before, but it's so polished that it feels like you're playing a far better game. Rare has gone on to bigger and better things, but *Dingo* is a testament to just how much raw talent it had.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

HAUNTED CASTLE

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Adventure

■ **When a franchise runs for nearly 25 years it's inevitable that it will produce the odd dud along the way. So it was, then, that two years after *Castlevania*, Konami decided to release the horrifyingly bad *Haunted Castle* on arcade goers.**

Everything about this 1988 release is a spectacular misfire that, had it been on a home console, could have potentially killed the series stone dead.

Filled with rudimentary animation and horrible visuals, later stages become so messy that it can be a nightmare to work out where you're even supposed to be going. Gameplay is even worse, as *Haunted Castle* is clearly designed to eke as much money out of the player as possible. Enemy attack waves are annoyingly erratic, your character takes an age to respond to the spongy controls, while the ridiculous difficulty makes it impossible to enjoy. Add in some pathetic bosses and this is a title that makes even the N64 games feel like absolute masterpieces.



POKÉMON MINI



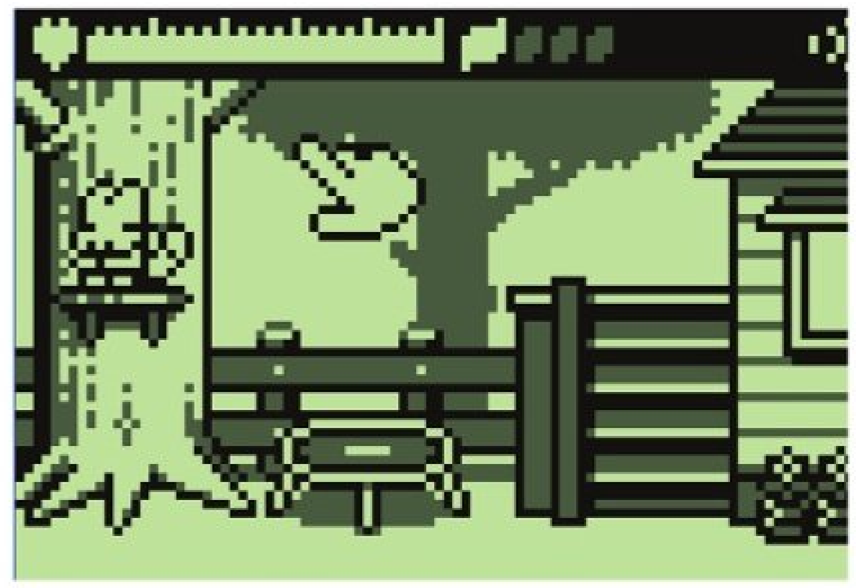
Put aside your preconceptions for a second. Though each of its games featured the love-or-hate-them Pokémon, Nintendo's Pokémon Mini handheld has as much right to appear within the pages of Retro Gamer as any other system, as Ashley Day explains

Released in 2001 and based around a brand very much aimed at today's children, the Pokémon Mini is a gaming system that arguably has no business appearing within the pages of Retro Gamer. But take a second look at this obscure part of Nintendo history and you might be surprised by how interesting, and how retro, it actually is.

The first and most important point to make about the Pokémon Mini is that it isn't a virtual pet device, it isn't a pedometer and it isn't a Game & Watch-style system with only one game built in. Such assumptions are understandable given the wide range of such Pokémon-branded items that have been released to date, but the Mini is actually a fully fledged handheld gaming system, just like a Game Boy. It uses interchangeable cartridges and plays simple dot matrix, monochrome games that have more in common with the technology of 1989 than 2001.

The great contradiction of the Pokémon Mini is that although it plays very simple videogames that use even simpler visuals, the interactive capabilities of the hardware did things the Game Boy Advance (released in the same year) could only dream of and were surely part of Nintendo's momentum toward the eventual creation of the DS and Wii. Hardware features include an internal real-time clock, an infra-red transmitter for multiplayer gaming and data transfer with up to five other players at once, in-built vibration for force feedback and a shock detector for very rudimentary motion control. All of which are crammed into a tiny 74mm x 58mm x 23mm casing, the smallest handheld ever to be produced by Nintendo.

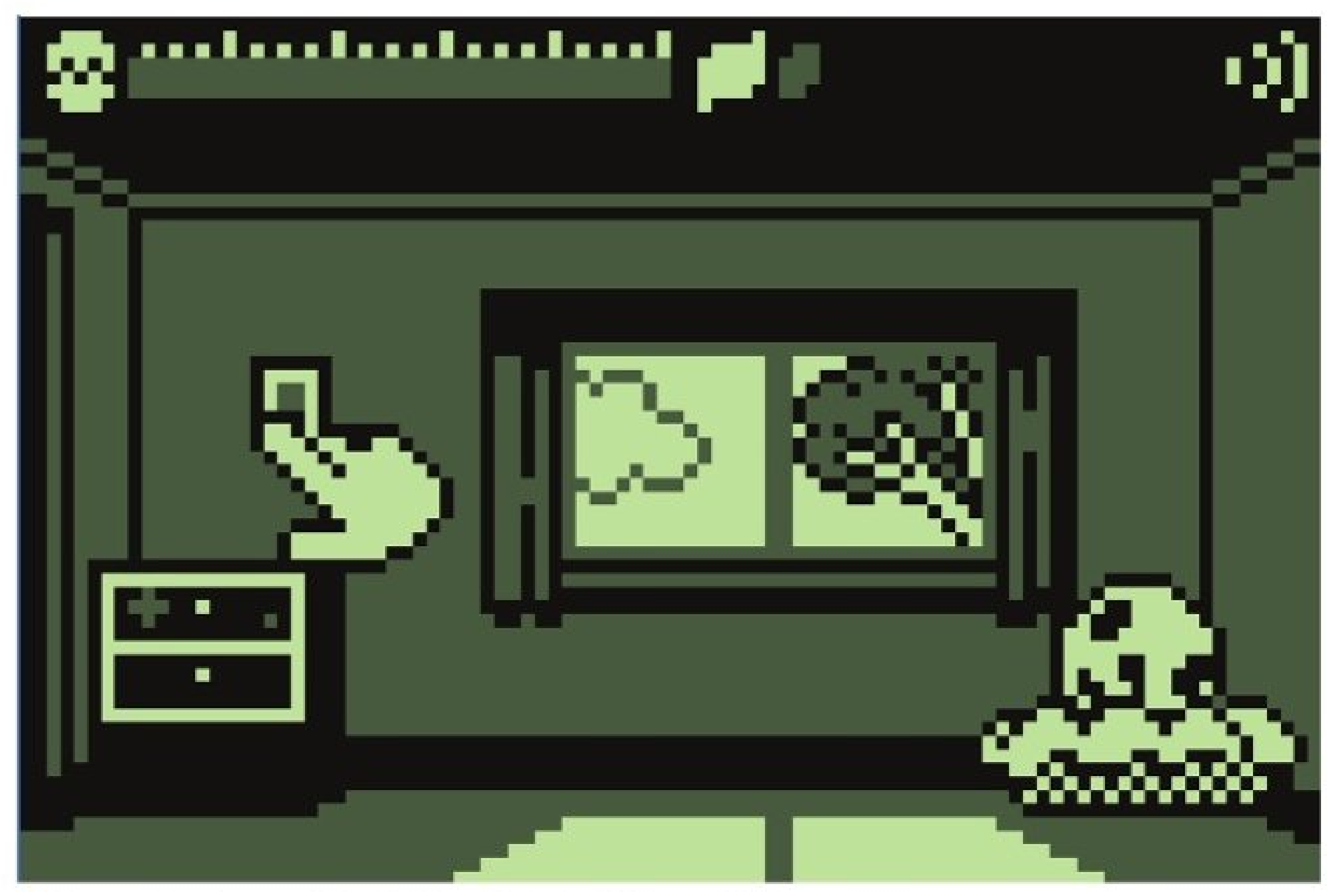




"The interactive capabilities of the hardware did things the GBA could only dream of"



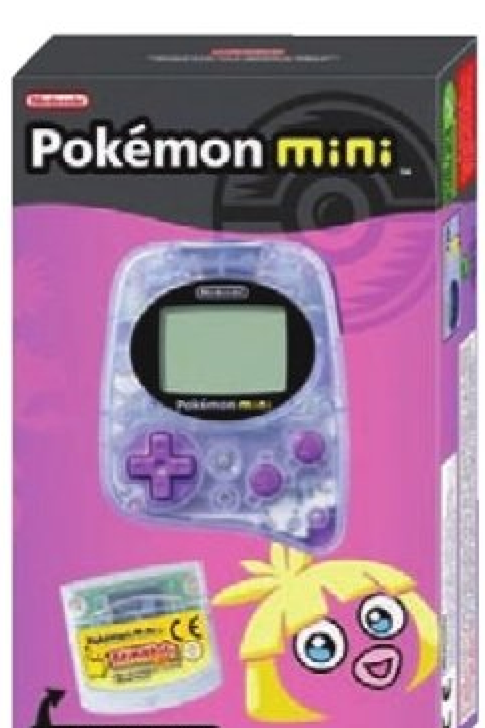
» Sadly, this isn't a fully playable version of *Elite*. It's just a demo mock-up.



» *Pokémon Breeder* is one of the highlights of the limited Pokémon Mini library.

So why is the Pokémon Mini so undocumented? Undoubtedly it's because of the association with the Pokémon brand. Every single one of the ten commercial games released for the system used the Pokémon licence, positioning the handheld as more of a kids' toy than a hardcore gaming system. The Mini was only ever sold in toy stores rather than dedicated game shops and although the price tag of £40 was attractive for a new console, £20 per cartridge was very steep for games that offered only a fraction of the entertainment available on other systems of the time. And with the GBA and cheaper Game Boy Color both offering their own fair share of Pokémon fun in addition to a wide range of other games, it's easy to see why even parents would think twice about buying a Mini for their children.

Following its 14 November 2001 release in the US, the Pokémon Mini made its way to Japan and Europe and enjoyed a regular stream of games – about one per month – until its final release *Pokémon Breeder* exclusively hit Japanese shelves in December 2002. The one-year shelf life is about twice the lifespan of Nintendo's highest-profile failure, the Virtual Boy, but with about half the number of commercial games released, the Pokémon Mini can easily be considered Nintendo's least relevant games console and would have slipped into total obscurity were it not for a strange twist of fate spurred on by a quirky feature in one of Nintendo's GameCube games.



» The Pokémon Mini was released in a number of colour variations, each named after a different Pokémon.

2003's *Pokémon Channel* was a relatively forgettable virtual pet game for GameCube, except for the fact that it included a simulated software version of the Pokémon Mini, complete with demos of some games as well as a full exclusive game of its own, called *Snorlax's Lunchtime*. This official emulator was instrumental in helping a handful of Pokémon Mini enthusiasts reverse engineer the handheld, develop an emulator of their own and begin to produce their own tech demos and homebrew games. And it is these dedicated few who are best equipped to tell us about the inner workings of the Mini and how it might have developed had Nintendo offered more support.

Detlef Hastik is founder of Team Pokémé, a demo group that spent a year developing their debut Mini production, a homebrew cart tech demo called SHIzZLE that shows off a number of gobsmacking visual techniques previously thought impossible on the hardware, including high-res title screens, 3D text, multiple layered sprites, fractal landscapes, shading, light sourcing, reflective spherical surfaces, sprite rotation and scaling, blocky *Starfox*-style 3D environments and even digitised video.

"When I discovered the Pokémon Mini in a sale-out box of a local games store in 2004, I first thought 'eek! Pokémon! What crap'," says Hastik. "But the price of just five euros made me look a

» Some of the games are quite valuable. The Euro release of *Shock Tetris* proving particularly rare.



(IM)PERFECT TEN



Only ten commercial games were ever released for the Pokémon Mini. But which, if any, were worth playing?

01 Pichu Bros. Mini
■ **DEVELOPER:** DENYUSHA
■ Mini-game collections were in abundance on Pokémon Mini… as much as you can have an abundance on a system with just ten games. This one stars Pichu, the cutesy pre-evolved version of Pikachu, in a series of small challenges including a nice little skateboarding sim.



02 Pokémon Pinball Mini
■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ *Pokémon Pinball* on Game Boy Color is one of the greatest videogame pinballs ever created. *Pokémon Pinball Mini*, sadly, is not. You simply control a Diglett who's used like a bumper to launch the ball toward a number of hole targets. It's nothing like pinball at all.



03 Pokémon Breeder Mini
■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ The last game to be released for Pokémon Mini is also one of the best. It enables you to raise one of three pocket monsters in a nice little virtual pet game that's big on physical interaction with the 'mon and features some nice interactive environments.



04 Pokémon Party Mini
■ **DEVELOPER:** DENYUSHA
■ *Pokémon Party* came bundled with the Mini and is a mini-game collection. Of the eight games on the cartridge, the best are Slowking's Judge, a tennis game where you have to declare if a ball lands in or out and Bellossom's Dance, a very simple Simon Says dancing game.



05 Pokémon Puzzle Collection
■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ A collection of jigsaw and maze-style puzzles, completion of which fills up a "Mini Pokédex" directory of monsters. Finish that and you unlock a bonus puzzle called Power On, a nice little *Pipe Mania* clone where you arrange a circuit to connect Pikachu to a lightbulb.



06 Pokémon Puzzle Collection 2
■ **DEVELOPER:** DENYUSHA
■ The only sequel to appear on the Pokémon Mini was also never released outside of Japan. This was more of the same, really, offering 80 new puzzles over four different game types that are very similar to those of the first.



07 Pokémon Race Mini
■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ One of the true jewels of the Pokémon Mini, *Pokémon Race* asks you to compete against a second monster or another player in a side-scrolling marathon. Obstacles and multiple routes keep the races interesting, add replay value and enough depth to make things unpredictable.



08 Pokémon Shock Tetris
■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
■ Without doubt the best game on the system and the main reason that many people seek out a Pokémon Mini at all. *Shock Tetris* delivers a classic *Tetris* experience with a couple of twists, including the ability to capture a random monster every time you clear four lines at once.



09 Pokémon Zany Cards
■ **DEVELOPER:** DENYUSHA
■ A series of four card games featuring a variety of Pokémon characters on the cards as well as various human characters from the main Pokémon games as the players. It can take a while to learn how the games function, but once you do they're a nice distraction.



10 Togepi's Great Adventure
■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ Another highlight, *Togepi's Great Adventure* asks you to roll the ovoid pocket monster through a series of 300 mazes of escalating challenge. As enemies and bottomless pits start to appear, things really become tough but ultimately rewarding.



» A few of the PM games were Japan-exclusive. Most import retailers still stock them, though.





little closer and I discovered that tiny cartridge sitting in the top-right corner of the box. My immediate idea was: 'It has cartridges, the data can be dumped and disassembled and it must be possible to code an emulator'. At this time I thought the Mini had a z80-based CPU, which turned out to be a big mistake. Nintendo designed a custom CPU and used custom maskROMs for its cartridge, but the motivation to hack this portable game console was unbreakable."

"Besides the fact that the Pokémon Mini is like a retro system with monochrome graphics, low resolutions and monophonic sounds – it was more or less unknown and 'untouched'," continues Hastik. "The scene had not taken notice of this handheld at the time. No development kits or programming manuals were available, no emulators or homebrew hacks were made. In fact, it was a crazy idea creating something like a scene milestone with this low-end hardware. We never expected SHizZLE to be referred to as the 'mother of all hacks' in the end."

Hastik describes the process of developing SHIzZLE as "very complex and intense", particularly because of the undocumented nature of the hardware. "As a Nintendo system everything is custom made: CPU, ROM chips and so on. I tried getting some information on the ROM from Macronix, the maker of the chips. They were very informative until they recognised the internal markup 'top secret' in their database. So I started out with a logic analyser at a friend's company lab and modified the code of my ancient EPROM programmer to dump a cartridge. It took some weeks until I got the first good byte combination. Afterwards, Darkfader [another member of Team Pokémé] figured out the banking thing and did the first complete dump using an FPGA. It was shocking: the bytes we got did not make sense in any disassembler available – we were stuck again. Then Nintendo released *Pokémon Channel* and opened the door. Using Parasyte's realtime GameCube debugger we worked ourselves through the code of the game and figured out which registers were modified by which byte combinations and then created our own instructions set – a mix of z80, 68k and other assembly languages."

Team Pokémé's demos have managed to make the Pokémon Mini sing in ways that were never apparently possible during the hardware's brief commercial existence and, more importantly, the growing number of playable homebrew games have expanded the range of available software beyond the limited potential of the Pokémon branding. "With 4MHz the CPU is quite fast, and because the display is very fast too, it is possible to do great stuff with it," says Hastik.

Of the homebrew games currently available, most are very simple programs that cover the same old bases as many other initial homebrew projects – *Pong* simulations and *Sokoban* clones, for example. But there are other developments, albeit incomplete, that hint at a much more ambitious future for the Pokémon Mini: a familiar-looking scrolling shooter called *P-Type*, a rolling demo of a *Final Fight* clone and a playable demo that does a rather convincing impression of *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening*.

"*Zelda Mini* is the most ambitious demo," says Hastik. "To finish a game in this dimension you need an excellent team to work on it. We've published all the stuff we did on **Pokémon-Mini.net** and are always waiting for people to continue this project. I have to admit that having some kind of adventure framework and a C compiler would make things a lot easier. But the Pokémon Mini community is just as small as the system itself. As a niche it is really cool and a nice experience for anyone who is willing to try coding assembly language."

Hastik is keen for more people to get involved with the Mini scene and help bring projects like *Zelda Mini* to fruition. "You can find everything you need on **Pokémon-Mini.net**", where the team's emulator/debugger is available alongside a good range of homebrew downloads, source code and a supportive community IRC channel to help get you started.

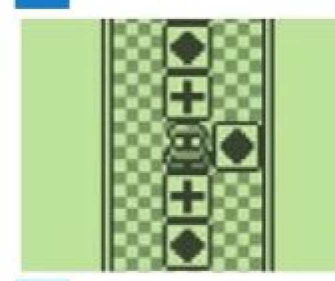
For everyone else who's just curious to try out the Mini for themselves, the unit is now available cheaply and easily. And while some of the games are a little harder to come by, as our accompanying guide shows, some of them are well worth tracking down. Team Pokémé also sells flashcards at **Pokémon-Mini.net**, so that the various homebrew games and tech demos can be enjoyed on the hardware they're supposed to be played on. So even if the sight of Pikachu and friends makes you a little queasy, you still might find something to enjoy on this unusual slice of Nintendo hardware history.



» Look at that! The cute little handheld is even smaller than the game packaging.

HOMEBREW HIGHLIGHTS

All of the playable homebrew games currently available for the Pokémon Mini from **www.Pokémon-Mini.net**



01 Cortex

■ A block-pushing puzzler in which you have to clear the screen by pushing together three blocks of the same type. With 40 levels, *Cortex* is one of the most complete-feeling homebrew games available.



02 Galactix

■ A solid vertically scrolling shooter that, despite the name, doesn't have that much in common with *Galaga*. In a nice touch the developers have included a number of cheat codes, which can be found at the website.



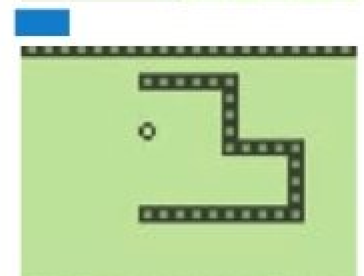
03 Lights Out

■ A classic puzzle game that works particularly well on a monochrome screen. This Pokémon Mini version adds virtually nothing to original game which, if we're honest, has never been that entertaining anyway.



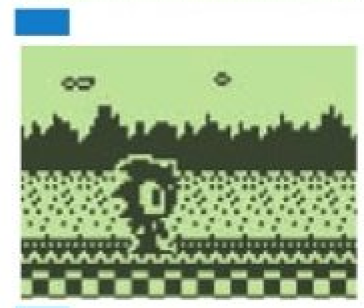
04 P-Type

■ Displaying some of most refined pixel art in a Pokémon Mini game, *P-Type* does its best *R-Type* impression, except without the Force or masterful level design. But that would be expecting a bit much now, wouldn't it?



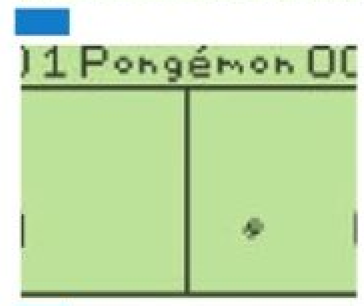
05 PokéSnake

■ If *Snake* could run on the mobile phones of the mid-Nineties then it can run on the Pokémon Mini too. This is nothing special, but it plays as well as you'd expect and works well within the confines of the Mini.



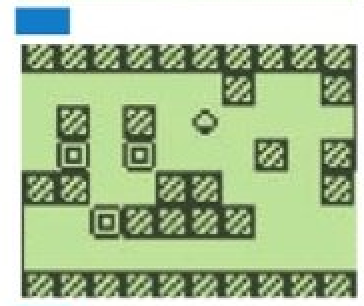
06 PokéSonic

■ Though *PokéSonic* is playable, it only lets you run left or right and jump up and down in an enemy-free area. There's little fun to be had here, but the promise of a decent *Sonic* tribute isn't outside the realms of plausibility.



07 Pongémon

■ It's *Pong* but on the Pokémon Mini. There's not much else to say really, so let's move along.



08 Sokomini

■ *Sokoban*, the game where you push blocks through a maze while trying not to push one into a dead end, is a classic puzzle game that's well suited to handhelds. And it works wonderfully on the Mini.



09 Zelda Mini

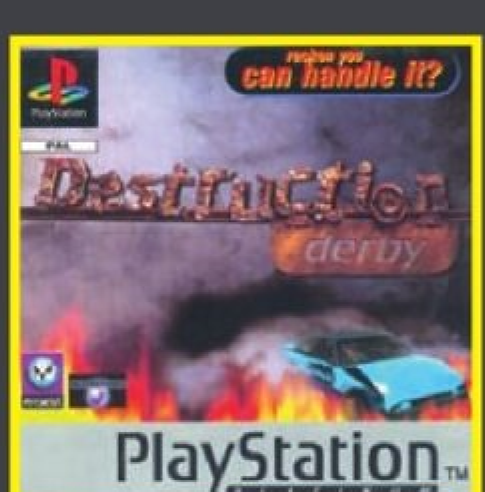
■ An impressive tech demo, *Zelda Mini* replicates the graphics of *Link's Awakening* and allows you to move Link around a small playable area. If this is ever expanded into even a small game it'll be an incredible feat.



» [PSone] Time trials were included if you wanted to see how fast you could push your car.

» [PSone] As well as the infamous Bowl, there were races too – with points for wrecking your opponents' cars.

DESTRUCTION DERBY



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
- » **DEVELOPER:** REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE
- » **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION, PC, SEGA SATURN
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **GENRE:** RACING
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

Where did the idea for *Destruction Derby* originally come from?
Martin Edmondson and Michael Troughton, my brother, together came up with the concept and design for the game. Martin was a big fan of real-life demolition derbies. We initially pitched it to Sony, along with a technology demo showing that we were more than capable of getting it done.

The game was originally going to be called *Demolish 'Em Derby*. Why did it change?
I can't remember, but I recall Sony didn't believe, at first, that we'd have the game finished in nine months – it wasn't until around two months from completion that they finally did and they offered us the chance of being a launch title for the PlayStation.

***Destruction Derby* has been referred to as "low-brow gameplay at its best". Do you agree?**
Definitely, yes. That's exactly what we went for when we made it. It was clear to us early on that *Destruction Derby* was going to be a very fun game to play and we just went overboard with it. Some people asked us to make it more realistic but to do so would have been at the expense of gameplay, so I'm very glad that we made it how we wanted to.

Physics definitely gave way to gameplay – how important was this?
Very. When you have 20 cars pushing each other around a track, 'sensible' driving just goes out of the window. We didn't cheat much to help the AI cope with this but the one thing that we did do was to increase the traction for the AI. Without that, they would just be slipping and sliding all over the track.

Arguably the best part of the game was the Bowl, where you and a dozen or so other cars could cause utter chaos…
The Bowl was just something completely different to the track-based derby – a complete free-for-all where you just had to smash everything possible and avoid being smashed yourself. There were several problems that we had to overcome with the Bowl. The number of collisions, particles, the complexity of the geometry and the number of cars on screen caused us many headaches with the frame rate, of course. Having so many cars trying to smash into you at the same time also created several AI-related issues. Then there's the problem of getting the cars to drive intelligently when their steering is smashed, when they can only turn in one direction and so on – all the problems that the player faced playing the game, we had to have the AI system handle as well. Unlike other games of the era, we didn't cheat with the AI or handling. Just like a human player, the AI could only steer and accelerate/decelerate. It was common in other games to see cars impossibly turning on the spot. We didn't do that.

So what about the Stock Car and Wreckin' Racing modes? Whose idea



» [PSone] Race courses were tight, with narrow tracks and evil bends.

It may have only taken nine months to make, but Destruction Derby smashed its way into the charts in the mid-Nineties. David Crookes buckles up and chats to programmer Robert Troughton

was it to introduce these sections and was there anything in particular that you wanted to achieve with them?
Wreckin' Racing was the mode that we started with. In this one, you had to combine racing with demolition. You could come first in racing but still lose overall if you didn't smash enough cars. This was really the original plan for the game. Stock Car Racing was added later on as a fairly obvious second mode – removing the need to smash other cars and turning it into a more typical race, albeit one where you could smash and spin out other cars in order to get to first place.

Was programming all of this an easy task, given the quick response and speed of the game?
It was all achieved through sheer determination. We had some of the best PSone programmers that there were working on this. Other teams working for Sony, such as the *WipEout* team, were amazed at what we were doing with the hardware. It certainly wasn't easy to get it all done and at a good frame rate, but we always loved challenges.

The tracks were narrow, slippery and bordered with walls. How did you draw them up?
We originally planned to ship a level editor with the game – a feature that was dropped due to time constraints. For that reason, it was all built in a very Scalextric style and on an 8x8 grid.When you think of how much estate that gives you to play with, it really isn't much so we'd really limited ourselves as to what we could do with the tracks: small corners (1x1 pieces), large corners (2x2 pieces), crossover (one piece) and straights (one piece) were about all that we implemented, along with narrowing of the lanes. Not only was it difficult to fit many track variations into this system, it was also difficult trying to fit 20 cars onto the tracks as well. Thankfully, the crazily packed tracks actually benefited the gameplay rather than hindering it.

There was no inside view of the cars, and no speedometer or gear shifting. Why was this?
Time. Again, we'd wanted to do this, but it was dropped in order for us to release the game at the same time as the PlayStation.

So was the lack of choice of cars or mechanical options deliberate too?
Partly. We wanted to keep things simple for the first game in the series but, also, time was against us.

How much of an influence did *Destruction Derby* have on your gaming life?
It was amazing. *Destruction Derby* was the first commercial game that I'd worked on so, to be part of such a small team and to create something that would be so successful was amazing. It's something that I'd love to have the chance to do again.



PLAY IT AGAIN

One of the great features of *Destruction Derby* was its replay editor. Given the chaotic nature of the game, it was possible to pull off some wonderful crashes, and it was inevitable that you'd want to play them back. The replay editor let you not only replay your scenes but chop out the bits you didn't like and position the camera in all sorts of ways to really milk the best of moments. It was like watching Eighties television stunts, only you were in control of the action.

"Martin Edmondson, MD of Reflections at the time, saw this as one of the main features. He'd always had a dream to be a Hollywood director, I think. *Stuntman*, a game that Reflections made many years later, was one that he'd often told us about. We'd laughed it off as something that would never work."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRIVER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, PC
YEAR: 1999

SHADOW OF THE BEAST
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, AMSTRAD CPC, C64, MEGA DRIVE, LYNX, MASTER SYSTEM, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1989

STUNTMAN
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2
YEAR: 2002



#03 The Revenge Of Shinobi





With five iterations, ninjitsu spells and no shortage of memorable bosses, Stuart Hunt dons a white Shinobi Shozoku and pieces together everything you need to know about Joe Mushashi's second, and best, mission

Instant Expert

Due to Sega cheekily borrowing the likenesses of various pop culture icons for many of the game's end-of-level guardians, five slightly different iterations of the game have found release.

***The Revenge Of** Shinobi* was released in 1989. It was directed by creator Noriyoshi Ohba with Shizuoka Taro (*Space Harrier II*) working as lead programmer.

The game's revered soundtrack was written by Yuzo Koshiro. Working freelance for Sega at the time, he went on to compose for a clutch of Sega classics, most notably the *Streets Of Rage* series.

There have been 13 *Shinobi* games in total, but Joe has only appeared in six of them. This tally includes the Western version of MD *Shadow Dancer*, which substituted out Joe's son for Joe.

The series has seen Joe's son, Hayate, and Joe's grandson (who is also named Joe) appear as central characters.

In 2002, THQ and Sega released a Game Boy Advance game titled *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. Despite what its title insinuates, it is neither a port nor a follow up to the Mega Drive game.

The Revenge Of Shinobi did find its way to arcades courtesy of Sega's Mega-Tech arcade board, which was based on Mega Drive hardware.

That *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is still considered by many to be one of the best action games to ever find release on the Mega Drive is a true testament to its brilliance. Released over 20 years ago, some six months or so after the Mega Drive's official launch in Japan, Joe Musashi's second adventure (entitled *Super Shinobi* in Japan) has gone on to become one of the machine's most enduring titles, and serves as conclusive proof that the best games don't necessarily come to us towards the end of a console generation.

Released in the wake of *Space Harrier* and *Super Thunderblade* – two pretty lacklustre Sega Mega Drive arcade sequels – *The Revenge Of Shinobi* came to effortlessly leave its mark on Mega Drive owners. This was largely thanks to its canny blend of arcade action, its jaw-dropping visuals, having one of the most memorable videogame soundtracks of all time and also for some cheeky unlawful impersonating and sometimes blatant use of a few well-established pop culture icons for its enemies and bosses, which forced the developer to make a series of revisions to the game to ensure they avoided litigation (turn the page to find out more).

It may surprise some of you to learn that the most recent revision of the game occurred as late as last year when the game was unshackled from copyright handcuffs, which was due to its inclusion of Spider-Man (which Sega no longer holds the videogame rights to – it's now Activision), and saw its first downloadable release through Nintendo's Virtual Console service, marking the fifth and very likely last incarnation of the game to find release.

Out with the old, in with the new

With its history rooted in the short-frills nature of arcade gaming, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* can be seen as one of the first – and arguably best – examples of Sega daring to do something a little different with one of its established arcade brands. The game was directed and overseen by *Shinobi* creator Noriyoshi Ohba, who, with the help of his small team, set about pushing the franchise in a subtle new direction. That's not to say *The Revenge Of Shinobi* eschews its arcade heritage, rather it cleverly carries over the iconic parts from the original coin-op (the use of magic, the many Western pop culture influences and memorable bosses) but omits those elements that feel inherent to arcade gaming (having no health bar, simplistic level structure and gameplay). In doing this Sega created a game that felt bigger, better and more suited to console gaming, while at the same time it offered a true showcase of the impressive technical capabilities of its new 16-bit machine.

For the benefit of those not familiar with the series, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s story followed on

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of The Revenge Of Shinobi. How many have you seen?



» Joe Musashi
» Blue Lobster
» Infantry Grunt
» Zeed Ninja - Wings
» Purple Phoenix
» Zeed Ninja - Green
» Kasumi
» Doppelgänger - Batman
» Doppelgänger - Devilman
» The Terminator
» The Terminator - Cyborg
» Infantry Grunt - Grenadier
» Shadow Dancer
» Pink Dragon
» Red Dragon
» Flamethrower Grunt
» Attack Dog
» Rambo
» Shogun - Red
» Doppelgänger - Spider-Man
» Infantry Grunt - Ground
» Blue Dragon
» Shogun - Blue
» Zeed Ninja - Black
» Kasumi - Disguise
» Supercomputer
» Neo Zeed Leader
» Godzilla

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought…



"One of the most outstanding games on the Mega Drive… The graphics are exquisite, the music superb, and the gameplay out of this world!"

- **MEAN MACHINES** 1990

Twin Galaxies High Scores

NTSC
- **NAME:** ANTONIO R. FILHO
- **POINTS:** 1,070,600

PAL
- **NAME:** ANDREW PETE MEE
- **POINTS:** 37,600

NTSC
- **NAME:** DANIEL C TEIXEIRA
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 16.13 MINS

PAL
- **NAME:** ASHLEY JACKSON
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 26:03 MINS

directly from the original. It saw the return of the series' recurring antagonist, a shady criminal organisation known as Zeed, that decides to exact revenge on Joe after he foils their plans at the end of the first game. Newly reformed, now under the slightly flashier-sounding name Neo Zeed, they attack Joe's Oboro ninja clansman, kill his master and kidnap his girlfriend and bride-to-be, Naoko. Understandably, Joe is left a little annoyed by all of this, so he sets out on a mission to seek some counter-vengeance by travelling to the Zeed's eight hideouts to defeat its new leaders, put a stop to their new reign of terror and save his girl.



Change is definitely a good thing

The sequel made a number of changes to the existing *Shinobi* template. Perhaps the most noteworthy alteration was the dropping of the previous 'free all the hostages to progress' gameplay. Instead, it was made simpler with Joe having to find and reach the exit to finish the stage. This was made challenging, though, through more intricate level design that included environ-based puzzles and the odd tricky platform section to test players. The game's levels



were more varied too, with Joe's mission taking him from idyllic locales in Japan, a dazzling nightclub, the top of a speeding commuter train, and ending in a well-fortified marine base. This sense of variety bled into other areas of the game too, with Joe given a much deeper combat system to play with.



While he kept his shurikens and katana (which he uses for close-quarters combat) from the first game, his ninjitsu spells were now split between offensive and defensive attacks. Players were also forced to conserve shurikens (Joe had an unlimited reserve in the first game), which also helped to imbue a subtle sense of strategy.

As well these various gameplay tweaks, the sequel also boasted better visuals through its great use of the Mega Drive's powerful M68000 processor, and came packaged with what many regard as one of the single greatest videogame soundtracks ever. Written by famed videogame composer Yuzo Koshiro, who later composed equally resplendent scores for the *Streets Of Rage* games and *Beyond Oasis (The Story Of Thor)*, the sublime soundtrack to the game is a real audio treat, and helps to further cement *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s status as a true videogame classic and the very best episode in the series.





» [Mega Drive] Certain stages revert back to the dual-plane mechanic utilised in the original *Shinobi* coin-op.

Joe's Ninja Arsenal

As well as his katana sword, Joe's not short of some fancy ninja armaments and spells to aid him on his revenge mission



» Shurikens /Throwing Knives
Joe's standard long-range weapons; conserving them is vital.



» POW
Increases the power of shurikens/ throwing knives so they can break through enemy defences.



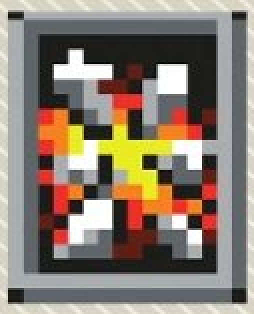
» Ikazuchi
A thunder spell that surrounds Joe with lightning bolts to protect him from enemy attacks.



» Karyu
A spell from the first game. It causes dragons made of flames to rise from the ground and attack all foes.



» Fushin
Gives Joe enhanced agility to get around the game's tricky platform sections.



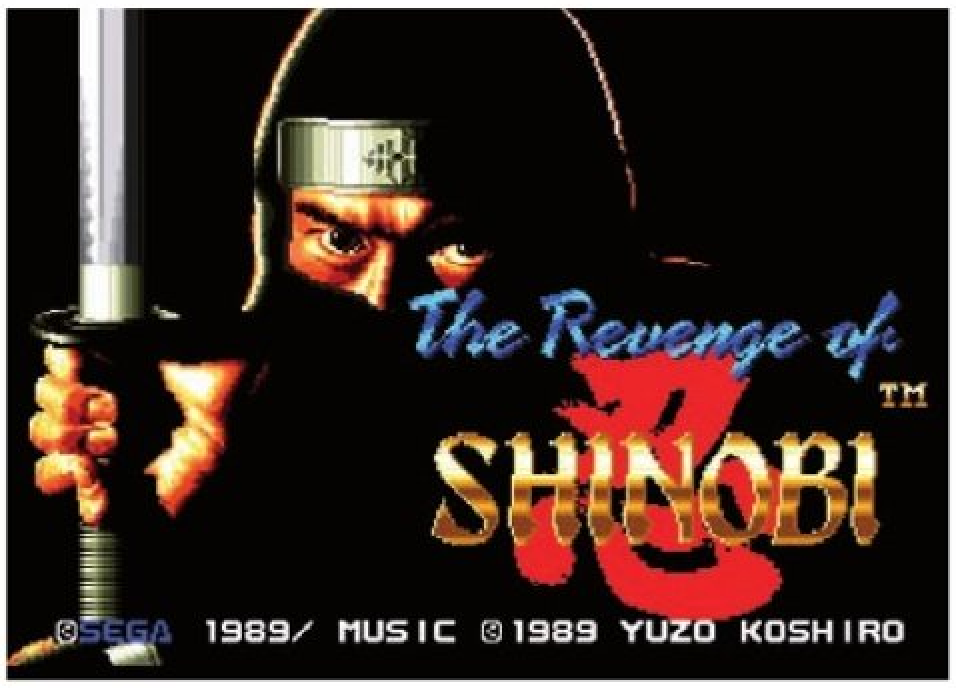
» Mijin
This offensive spell causes Joe to explode, attacking everything on screen. This is at the cost of a life.

Memorable Moments

Our favourite bits from The Revenge Of Shinobi

Flashy flash screen

The game's title screen shows a picture of martial arts actor, Sonny Chiba, and is taken from the television series *Kage No Gundan*. Oddly, it gives the impression that Sonny is seen dressed in a black Shinobi Shozoku, despite the fact Joe's attire is white.





Scene setting

The intro offers us our first true snippet of information about Joe's past. He's from a clan of ninjas known as the Oboro and was due to wed Naoko. That was before Neo Zeed kidnapped her, attacked his clan and murdered his master.



Whiter than white

TROS marks the first time in the series that we see Joe wearing his lustrous white Shinobi Shozoku. It's certainly a far more striking costume than the boring grey and yellow number from the first game.



Joe be nimble

It's fair to say that, in the original *Shinobi*, Joe wasn't the most agile of ninjas. This point was addressed in the sequel, where Joe was given a handy but tricky-to-perform double-jump that enabled him to navigate around the levels easier.



Spell casting

While Joe's Ninjitsu spells were in the first game, Sega was starting to think a lot harder about how it could better implement them in the sequel. It stumbled on incorporating defensive, as well as offensive, spells in the game.



Panic at the disco

Perhaps the most memorable boss battle in the game is the fight against the yellow *Shadow Dancer* ninja in a nightclub at the end of the second stage. An inspired mix of visual effects and music make this a standout moment.



Sonic Boom

The soundtrack is widely considered to be one of the best videogame scores of all time. It's a joyous blend of emotive Japanese compositions and techno beats, and serves as another fitting example of the series' 'East meets West' theme.



A visual treat

With its nicely detailed characters and variety of levels that made brilliant use of the Mega Drive's parallax scrolling capabilities, it's easy to see why the game became so popular on its release. This or *Altered Beast*? No contest.



Unlicensed to kill

TROS is famed for its unauthorised use of various pop culture icons in the game, of which include Godzilla, Spider-Man and Batman. When their respective owners found out, Sega was forced to alter the offending sprites.



Getting in a muddle

The levels in the game are larger than those in the prequel and many contain subtle puzzle or platformer elements. The game concludes with a tough final stage that sees Joe getting lost in a labyrinth inside Neo Zeed's marine hideout.



Happy endings

The final boss fight sees Joe racing to defeat the Neo Zeed leader before Naoko, who's trapped in a cage, is crushed by the lowering stone ceiling. It's a dramatic conclusion to the game, and a final and fitting test of skill for any *Shinobi* fan.

There are two endings to The Revenge Of Shinobi - good and bad. The good ending is widely considered one of the hardest videogame challenges, and is your reward for defeating the Neo Zeed leader before the ceiling flattens Joe's fiancée. If you've managed to see the good ending, well done – you may now change your name to Joe Mushashi by Deed Poll.













THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO… #03 The Revenge Of Shinobi

The Revenge Trail

The Bride's tale of vengeance in *Kill Bill* may have had some epic moments of comic book violence and its fair share of memorable fights, but it pales in comparison to Joe's mission of reckoning. We plot his bloody trail for revenge after his Oboro clansmen are attacked, his master killed and his girlfriend kidnapped.









01 Ibaraki Province, Japan

The first stage plonks Joe in familiar ninja surroundings. Featuring bamboo thickets and shoin-zukuri architecture, Joe must battle ninjas and attack dogs to reach The House Of Confusion – which, oddly, isn't all that confusing when you arrive there. With switches and a hidden underground passageway, it demonstrates straight away the subtle gameplay changes Sega made to the gameplay.

Boss: Blue Lobster



This boss may only have one tedious attack but his tough samurai armour makes him no pushover. His weak spot is his head, which he leaves open every time he makes his attack. Make easy work of him by repeatedly dodging his sword attack with a timely double-jump shuriken spray attack – just ensure you've been conserving those shurikens.

02 Tokyo

The first section is probably one of the trickiest in the game. Set against a canyon, Joe must rely on his ninja agility to get around by jumping between logs as they travel down a waterfall. The second is simple straightforward side-scrolling beat-'em-up action, taking place on the dark streets and rooftops of Tokyo where martial artists and female assassins dressed as nuns try to take him down.

Boss: Shadow Dancer

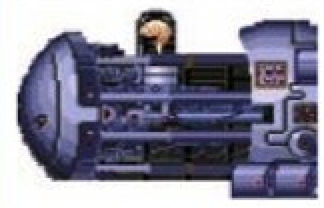


This stage ends in an impressive-looking nightclub where Joe must face off against the Shadow Dancer, a yellow ninja who can create a trail of doppelgangers of himself like some kind of human ninja centipede. Each doppelganger takes one hit to kill, and when he's down to his true form he blends into his dark surroundings like a chameleon.

03 Military Base

Enemies on this level include armed guards, more attack mutts and flamethrower-wielding *Rambo* lookalikes – although these are substituted for bald guys in later versions. This section is notable for being the first of two stages in the game that pay homage to the dual-plane mechanic from the first *Shinobi*, with Joe jumping between the foreground and background to take out his enemies. The second section is set aboard an airship, and Joe must be mindful of the ship's airlocks, which pull him out the stage at the cost of a life.

Boss: Supercomputer



One of the more unusual bosses in the game is this large laser-guarded supercomputer, which is running from a human brain. The brain serves as the rather obvious weak spot of this boss, and must have been extracted from a nosey idiot ninja as it keeps popping in and out of its protective metal casing to take a look at the action, which is Joe's time to strike.

04 Detroit

This stage takes place in the rundown-looking Detroit, and has obviously been inspired by Paul Verhoeven's bleak vision of the city in *Robocop*. The second stage, which takes place inside some kind of automobile manufacturing factory, also riffs off *The Terminator*, with Joe avoiding crushing machinery as he works through the level's maze-like design using his ninja agility and the environment to find the exit.

Boss: The Terminator



Signalling the first of *TROS*'s many litigation-baiting bosses, this familiar-looking muscle man draws things to a memorable close on the fourth stage. With giant chest and sunglasses, this car-tossing boss is clearly based on Arnold Schwarzenegger. However, when he gets hit he slowly turns green with rage like The Incredible Hulk… that is until his skin breaks away to reveal a T-800-style endoskeleton, which then explodes.

06 Chinatown



Similar to the second stage of the Tokyo level, this level sees Joe beating down martial art gangs and more fake nuns through the dimly lit streets of Chinatown. The second section sees Joe fighting ninjas on top of a speeding train while avoiding steel obstructions – get hit once and it wipes out a life.

It's certainly a tense and tricky level to beat, but the setting, coupled with the two-part boss fight that ends this stage, makes it one of the standout levels in the game.

Boss: Spider-Man

Marvel's mouthy web-slinger makes a cameo at the end of the scene, in what is possibly the Mega Drive's first ever WTF moment. Spidey sticks himself to the ceiling and fires down webs to trap Joe, occasionally dropping down to hit him. Sega actually held the licence to Spider-Man when it produced *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin*, so Spidey appears in every version of the game bar the most recent VC release. His proper Marvel signed-off appearances, though, are found in versions 1.02 onwards – distinguished by a copyright message on the start screen.

Boss: Batman/Devilman

To at least keep things fair, Sega decided not to discriminate between the two big comic book publishers, so after Spidey has been beaten in comes Bats to finish the fight. The Caped Crusader only appears in version 1.0. From 1.01 onwards Sega replaced him with Devilman, a character based on a Japanese manga who actually went on to appear in two of his own videogames.



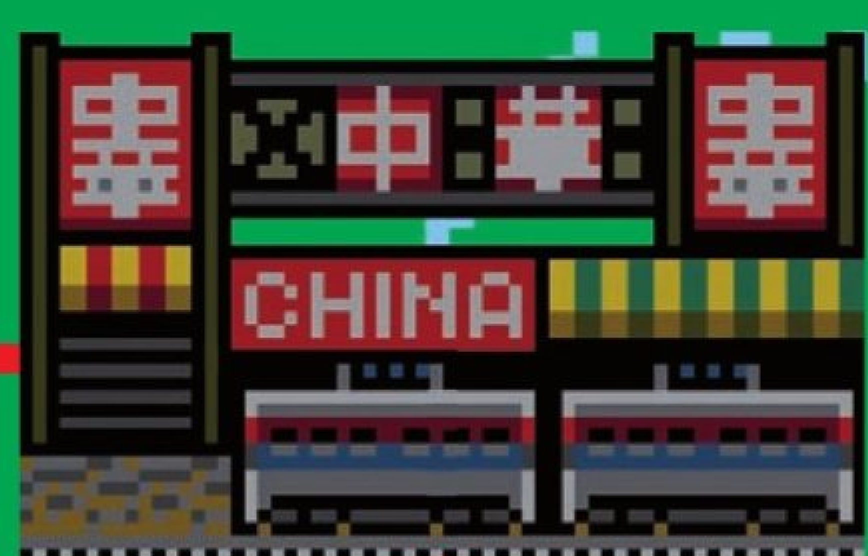
08 Neo Zeed Marine Stronghold

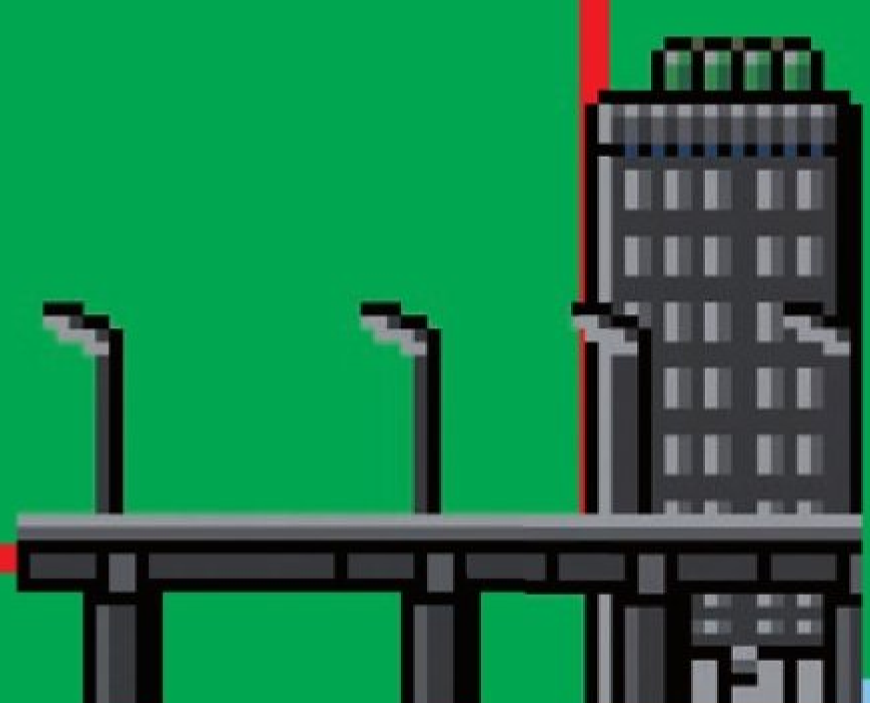
This is it – the final stage of the game. Yet for all its promise and cinematic buildup it ends on a bit of a frustrating note. The first section is very similar to the New York docklands stage, and sees Joe battling to reach Neo Zeed's heavily guarded stronghold. Then, once inside, he is greeted by a perplexing maze of entrances and exits, and must find the correct doorway that will lead him to his betrothed.

Boss: Leader of Neo Zeed



The Neo Zeed leader is basically just an evil troll doll, attacking Joe with his weird sentient wig, which he either slaps forward like a wet towel or tosses like a hirsute boomerang. Defeating him is pretty easy, though. Simply get in close, duck when he makes his wet towel attack and give him a good kicking. Defeating him before the stone ceiling crushes Naoko to reward you with the good ending is a little trickier, however.









05 Area Code 818

According this stage's title, this level takes place in California. The first section sees Joe fighting to reach the top of a skyscraper fortified with armed guards and gun emplacements, while the second section (which feels very reminiscent of the first level of *Dragon Ninja*) is set on a freeway. Here, Joe fights nun-dressed assassins and soldiers while avoiding speeding traffic.

Boss: Ballistic Missile



This end boss is a typical *Shinobi* guardian: a giant mode of transportation. This speeding ballistic missile carrier pegs down the freeway and Joe must stop it before it reaches its destination. To do this Joe must destroy the three bulbous weak spots found on its roof. This won't be easy, however, as they're protected by cannons and an electric pulse that travels down the entire length of the carrier.

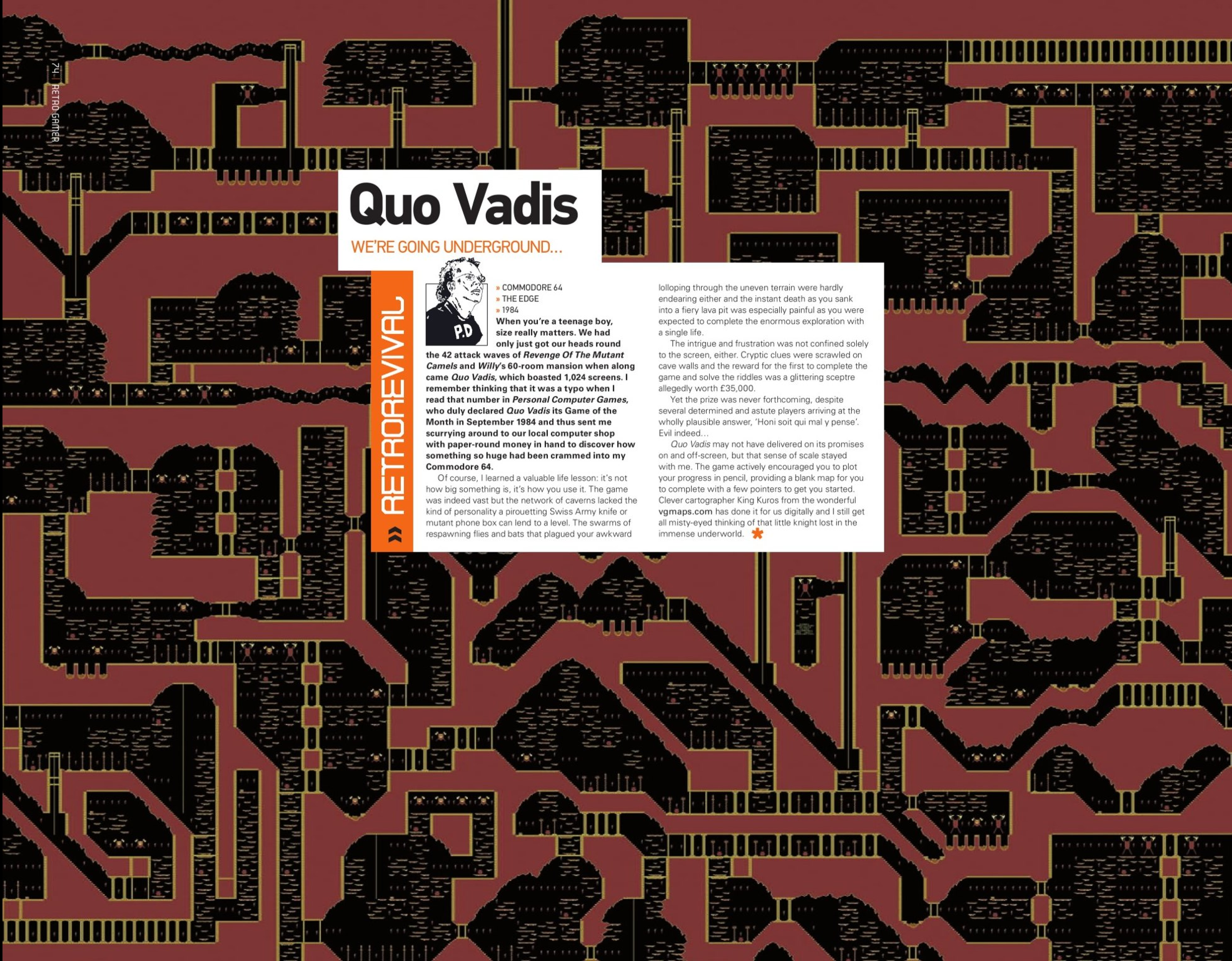
07 New York

No videogame featuring ninjas would be complete without a stage set in New York, and that's exactly where the penultimate level is set. Weirdly enough, perceptive *Shinobi* fans may notice that this stage looks very similar to the second stage of *Shinobi*. It takes place around the city's docklands, with Joe avoiding a drenching by jumping onto dinghies and bollards. The second part sees Joe inside a container ship full of armed guards. Wonder what they could be hiding in there that's so important?

Boss: Godzilla



It's Godzilla, of course. Use his sluggish speed to your advantage by drawing him to one end of the screen, attacking his head while avoiding his fire-breath attack, and then double-jumping over his tiny cranium to repeat the process at the other end. In version 1.03, Sega replaced Godzilla with a giant dinosaur skeleton.



» RETROREVIVAL

Quo Vadis

WE'RE GOING UNDERGROUND…

» COMMODORE 64
» THE EDGE
» 1984

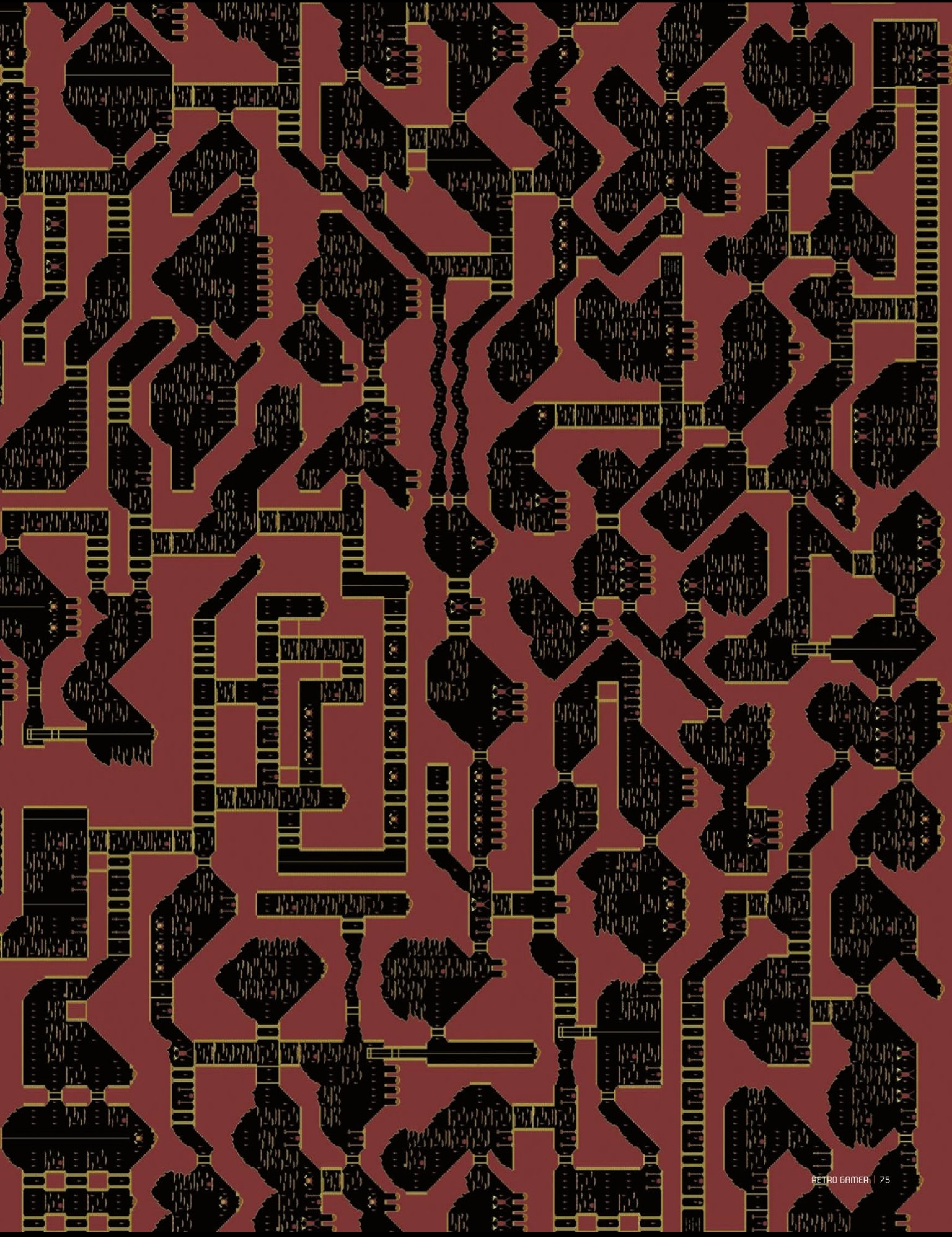
When you're a teenage boy, size really matters. We had only just got our heads round the 42 attack waves of *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* and *Willy*'s 60-room mansion when along came *Quo Vadis*, which boasted 1,024 screens. I remember thinking that it was a typo when I read that number in *Personal Computer Games*, who duly declared *Quo Vadis* its Game of the Month in September 1984 and thus sent me scurrying around to our local computer shop with paper-round money in hand to discover how something so huge had been crammed into my Commodore 64.

Of course, I learned a valuable life lesson: it's not how big something is, it's how you use it. The game was indeed vast but the network of caverns lacked the kind of personality a pirouetting Swiss Army knife or mutant phone box can lend to a level. The swarms of respawning flies and bats that plagued your awkward lolloping through the uneven terrain were hardly endearing either and the instant death as you sank into a fiery lava pit was especially painful as you were expected to complete the enormous exploration with a single life.

The intrigue and frustration was not confined solely to the screen, either. Cryptic clues were scrawled on cave walls and the reward for the first to complete the game and solve the riddles was a glittering sceptre allegedly worth £35,000.

Yet the prize was never forthcoming, despite several determined and astute players arriving at the wholly plausible answer, 'Honi soit qui mal y pense'. Evil indeed…

Quo Vadis may not have delivered on its promises on and off-screen, but that sense of scale stayed with me. The game actively encouraged you to plot your progress in pencil, providing a blank map for you to complete with a few pointers to get you started. Clever cartographer King Kuros from the wonderful **vgmaps.com** has done it for us digitally and I still get all misty-eyed thinking of that little knight lost in the immense underworld. *





FROM THE
ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

MICROMEGA

Micromega achieved legendary status by sole virtue of releasing Deathchase, but very little is known about the software house itself. Martyn Carroll talks to the company's key people to find out the full story

When writing about retro software houses it's all too easy to get misty-eyed and wistful about the games they released. This is very much the case with Micromega as it was responsible for much-loved titles like *Deathchase, Full Throttle* and *Codename MAT*. But let's not forget that software companies don't bring games to market to win plaudits or enrich our lives (although managing to do either must be a nice little bonus). They do it to make money, first and foremost, and Micromega was no different. However, there was a very specific reason why the people behind Micromega wanted to generate cash, and it wasn't all about lining pockets or funding lavish lifestyles.

Despite being best known for its games, the history of Micromega is rooted in business software. In fact, it wouldn't have existed without business software. Micromega was actually the personal computer division of a company called Quantec Systems and Software Limited. "To call it a 'division' is actually pretty pretentious!" laughs Robin Cooke-Hurle, managing director of Quantec. "The background is that myself and two other guys worked for Rank Xerox, and we left in 1982 to start up Quantec, which was going to be purely about producing business software for corporate firms. It had nothing to do with games whatsoever.

"Now developing the business software was going to take a while before it generated any cash, and developing the software itself required money, so we looked around for something that would act as a funding mechanism for our commercial software. We wanted a quick fix, as it were."

That fix was Micromega, which was formed in mid-1982 to take advantage of the booming home computer market. The first release from the fledgling label was a 1Kb personal income tax program for the Sinclair ZX81 called Comp-U-Tax. "It was sold through WH Smith and it made us a fair amount of money and kept the bills paid," remembers Robin. "And then, out of nowhere, this guy sent us some computer games for the ZX81 and asked if we'd like to distribute them. We were amazed, as our background had nothing to do with retail or entertainment or anything like that. It was completely alien to us. But we went ahead and published these games and they kind of did okay, but not terribly well."

Micromega was off to a reasonable start, but it needed someone with a better understanding of the burgeoning home market to really drive it forward.

The other man

Neil Hooper admits to following the camber in the road of life. After spells in banking and sales, he moved into journalism and worked on *Melody Maker* and its sister paper *Musicians Only*. When *Musicians Only* was closed, he found himself making another career leap.

Neil says: "I was lucky enough to have a relationship with a company in Holloway that was responsible for mass cassette

INSTANT EXPERT

There's more to Micromega than *Deathchase*. Between 1982 and 1985, the company released close to 30 titles, with the majority being arcade-style games. The Sinclair Spectrum was Micromega's main platform, but software was also released for the ZX81, Dragon 32, Grundy NewBrain, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64.

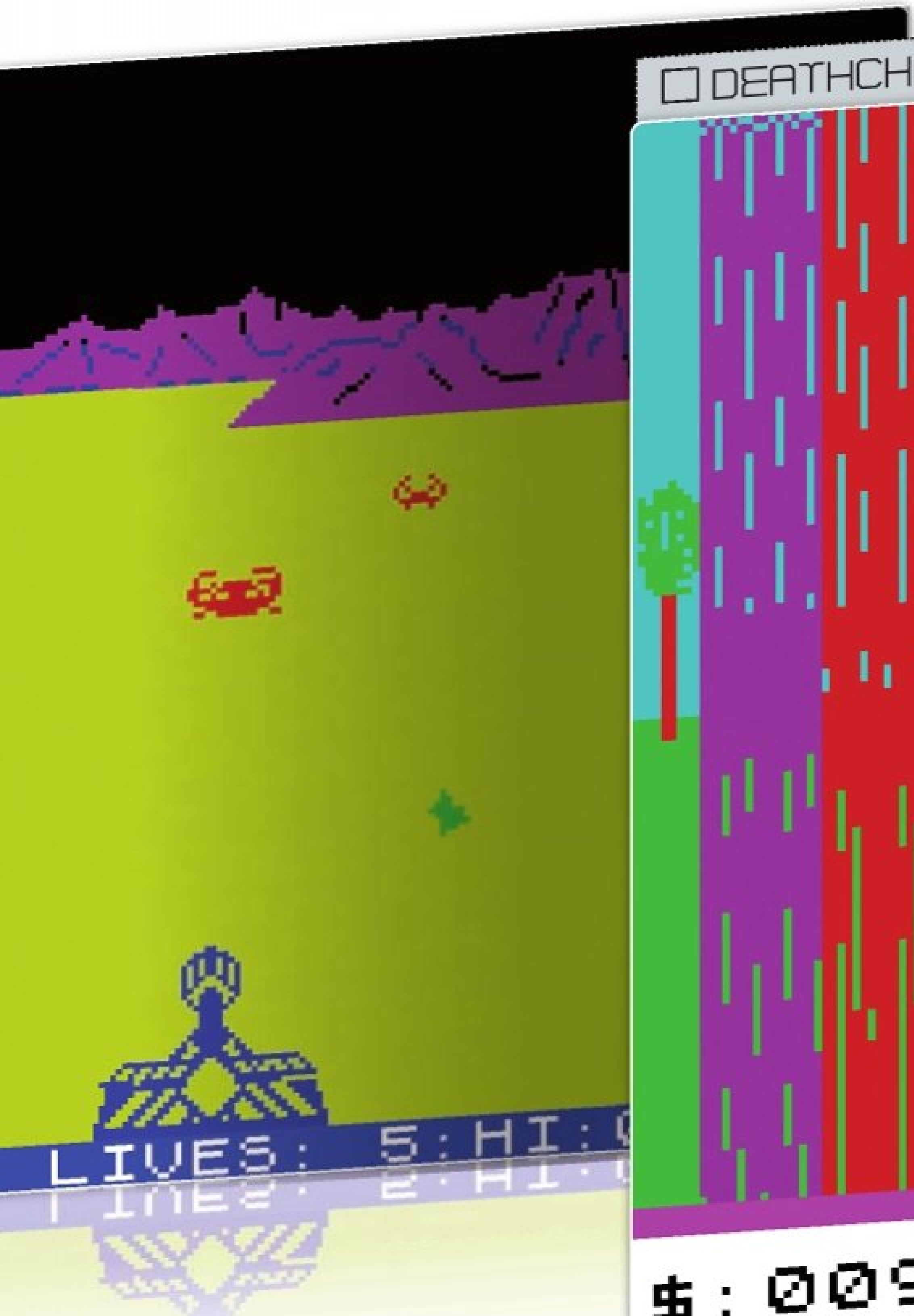
Neil Hooper joined Micromega from a tape duplicating company imaginatively named The Tape Duplicating Company.

Micromega's only in-house employee was Neil Hooper. Mervyn Estcourt, Derek Brewster and the other programmers all worked from home and were paid on a game-by-game basis.

One of the first programmers to work with Micromega was Tony Poulter from Kent. He programmed some of the early ZX81 games Spectrum educational titles, but is best remembered for creating episodic space game *Braxx Bluff*.

***Deathchase* was named** 'New Game Of The Month' in the first issue of *Crash* magazine. This was before the coveted 'Crash Smash' awards were handed out.

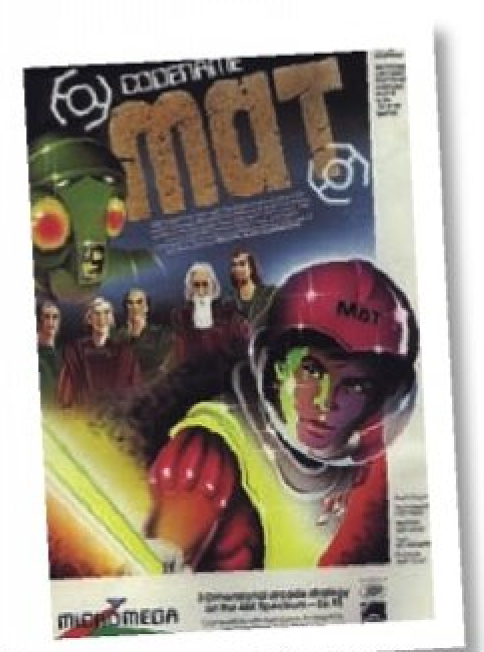
Codename MAT went through several name changes. It was known as 'Invasion 2000' and 'Codename FRED' before the final title was selected. MAT stood for 'Mission: Alien Termination'.



DEATHCHASE



> **“The buyer at WH Smith took one look at the game and ordered thousands of copies”**
>
> ROBIN COOKE-HURLE ON THE INSTANT APPEAL OF LUNA CRABS



duplication and I ended up running the production lines there. Around that time home computers were just starting to take off in the UK, and cassette tape was the medium that programs were being distributed on. In those days people were just recording programs onto tape, one-by-one in real time, straight from their computers. And I suddenly realised that, here I was, standing in the largest mass cassette duplication plant in Europe, and we could produce 10,000 tapes in half an hour or something ridiculous like that, and they were all professionally done with a nice inlay and so on. I saw an opportunity and the bosses told me to see if I could make it work, because the nature of audio is quite different to data on a recorded medium – weird things happen when you go to high speed. In short, I managed to make it work, make it reliable, and I created a new business line for the company.”

The timing was perfect. The ZX81 had just launched in the UK, bringing affordable home computing to the masses, and it was soon followed by the superior and wildly successful ZX Spectrum. Competing micros seemed to be launching every other week. High-street chains like WH Smith and Boots were in on the act and they wanted software. Lots of it. And it had to be professionally produced. DIY photocopied covers would not do. “Suddenly there was a market and there was a bunch of people struggling to produce the product, and we were able to provide a service that would solve the problem for all these little guys who were going out and buying blank tapes for 75p a time and trying to record their programs themselves. We could churn them out for 30p each.”

Neil’s duplicating operation was soon running at full crank, producing large tape runs for the likes of Bug-Byte and Quicksilva. “During that first big Spectrum Christmas of 1982, 18 out of the 20 best-selling titles in WH Smith came out of my plant. It all happened so quickly. It suddenly became a business instead of a cottage industry.”

One of Neil’s clients was Micromega, which led to a meeting with Robin and a chance proposal. Neil says: “Quantec mainly produced heavyweight business software for accountancy firms, but they were looking to move into the personal computer market. By this point I knew the market very well, from both the publishing side and the distribution side, and I knew all of the other publishers and what they were up to. So Robin asked if I’d like to take control of Micromega. I felt like I’d gone as far as I could with the tape operation so I accepted his offer.”

Neil joined Micromega in early 1983, initially as sales manager, before becoming general manager. “Neil’s contribution cannot be underplayed,” says Robin. “He basically came in and ran Micromega.

BY THE NUMBERS

90,000 the total number of worldwide sales of *Full Throttle* on the Spectrum.

9K the memory taken up by the *Deathchase* code.

8 the number of sectors in *Deathchase* (each sector did have both a day and night patrol as well).

93% the score awarded to *Codename MAT* by *Crash* magazine. This was the highest percentage score awarded to a Micromega game by the Newsfield mag.

21 the number of keys required to play *Codename MAT.*

22 the number of screens in *Jasper.*

25 Derek Brewster’s age when he wrote *Haunted Hedges*, his first game for Micromega.

5 the varying skill levels available in *Haunted Hedges.*

50 the number of collectable objects in *Kentilla.*

175 miles per hour was the maximum speed of your bike in *Full Throttle.*

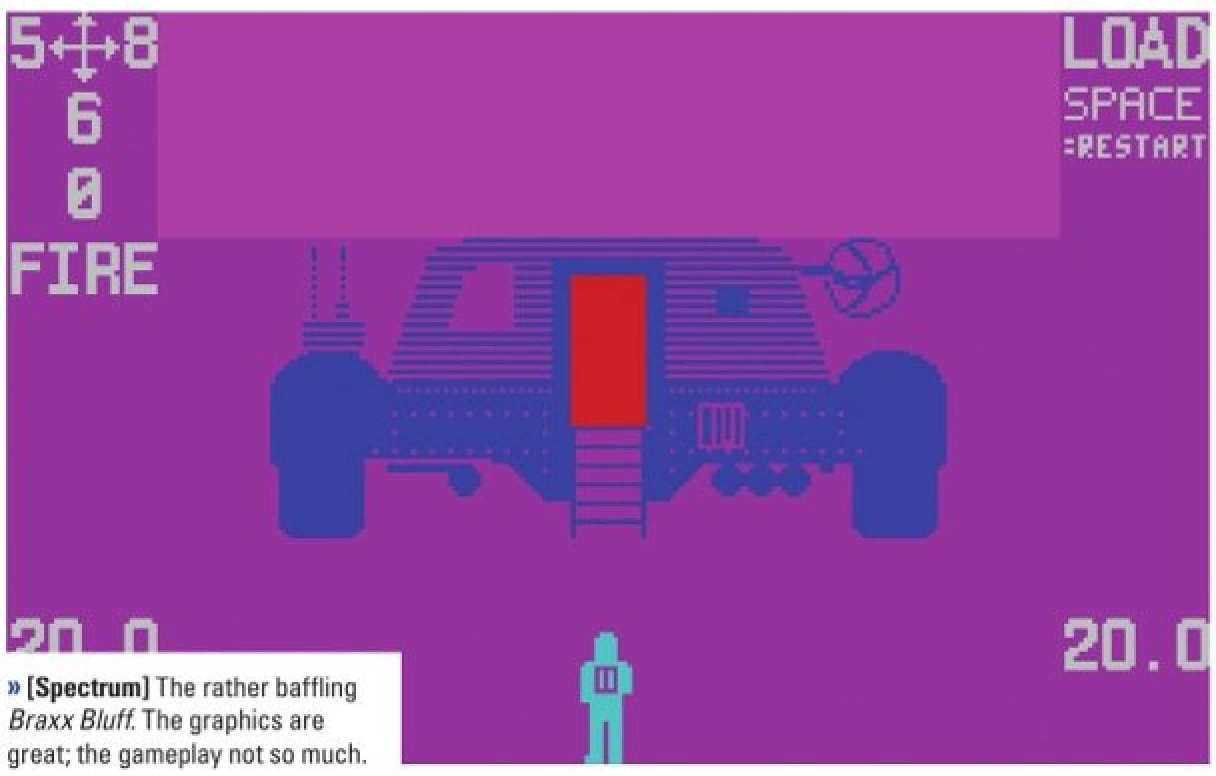


» [C64] One of Micromega's rare C64 releases, the multi-stage arcade action thingy *Jinn Genie*.

TIMELINE

1982

QUANTEC SYSTEMS AND SOFTWARE LTD IS INCORPORATED ON 16 APRIL 1982 WITH ROBIN COOKE-HURLE NAMED AS ITS MANAGING DIRECTOR. LATER IN THE YEAR, MICROMEGA IS FORMED AS THE HOME COMPUTER DIVISION OF QUANTEC. PERSONAL FINANCE SOFTWARE AND SOME GAMES ARE RELEASED FOR THE ZX81.



» [Spectrum] The rather baffling *Braxx Bluff*. The graphics are great; the gameplay not so much.

"Mervyn was extraordinary. He just wrote these killer games" NEIL HOOPER ON CODING WHIZ MERVYN ESTCOURT

He had an amazing instinct for retail and marketing. He just instinctively understood it. He was also able to build up very strong relationships with all of the distributors. We were really lucky to find him."

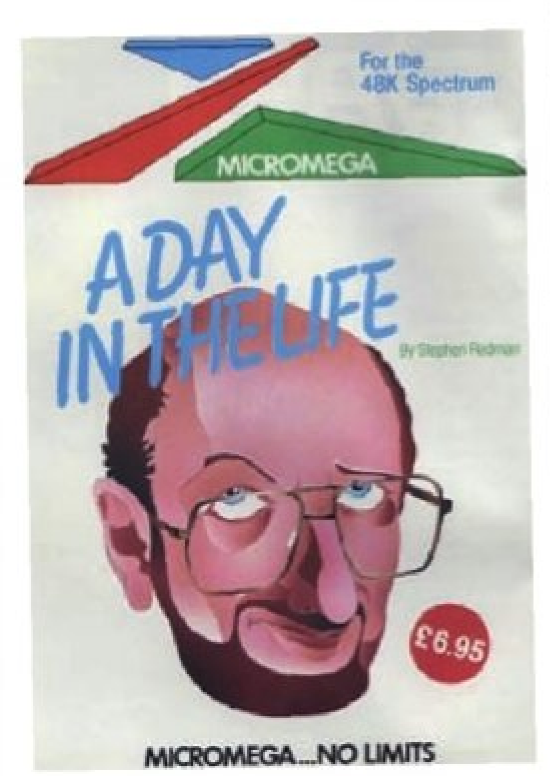
Estcourt for hire

With Neil on board, Micromega decided to try to target a wide audience with a bunch of traditional games for the Spectrum – stuff like Blackjack, Dominoes and Roulette, plus a few simple puzzle games. Some of these family-friendly titles were programmed in-house, in BASIC, by Neil himself. They received middling reviews with sales to match, and convinced Neil to rethink the way they originated software. "We didn't really want to program games in-house because that would become a big overhead. Publishing and distribution were our strengths, not games design. We figured that what we needed were some good authors who didn't have the resources to get themselves to market. Back in those days you didn't really need to advertise for programmers. Aspiring authors were pushing their stuff around and popping up and saying 'I've got this great game'."

And that's exactly what happened when, out of the blue, a mysterious Spectrum cassette dropped through the letterbox. Robin says: "We received this game called *Luna Crabs* written by a guy named Mervyn Estcourt, and it was on a completely different level. I mean it was brilliant. I had no concept that this sort of thing could be done on a Spectrum. So we offered Mervyn a royalty deal and told him we'd see what we could do with it. And the buyer at WH Smith, a man named John Rowland, just took one look at the game and ordered thousands of copies!"

Micromega was suddenly on the map thanks to this fast and funky 3D-style shooter, and the gaming world was introduced to the coding talents of one Mervyn J Estcourt. The enigmatic programmer would follow *Luna Crabs* with two even better games: *Deathchase* in early 1984 and *Full Throttle* later the same year. His rather unusual name, coupled with the fact that he has never been interviewed, has led some to believe that Mervyn Estcourt might be a pseudonym for another programmer. This was not the case.

"Mervyn was extraordinary," remembers Neil. "He worked at the docks in Bristol, so this was a normal guy who obviously had amazing programming talent, yet had a manual job. And he just wrote these killer games. It wasn't just that he was able to make things move around the screen as he did, but he also had an extraordinary sense for playability and natural game flow. *Deathchase* was a really tight piece of code, and the great thing about tight code is that it runs fast. It became a very successful relationship. He was chucking product our way and we were shovelling money his way. I believe *Deathchase* bought his house for him."



Robin also remembers him as a brilliant programmer, albeit one with certain insecurities. "He was quite an unusual character. It seemed to me that that he found it very hard to trust anyone, so it became quite hard negotiating with him. He did three games for us and he made a lot of money, and I think he just felt insecure about it. In fact, the only time he would visit the office would be to argue about money! Nobody begrudged him though as he was a really, really clever guy."

Micromega's other star turn was Derek Brewster from Gateshead, who had already written several games for the Spectrum that he'd largely self-published. Like Mervyn, he speculatively approached Micromega with his software and was offered a deal on the spot. He programmed maze game *Haunted Hedges* and shoot-'em-up *Starclash* for the 16K Spectrum, before turning his attention to the larger 48K model to create perhaps his most memorable and impressive title, the space epic *Codename MAT*. "Derek was a very put-together individual," says Robin. "He was very articulate, very sensible, and you could plan games with him, which was completely different to Mervyn. You couldn't in any sense manage Mervyn. A game would arrive when he was ready. But with Derek there was constant dialogue and he'd come down to London and see us regularly. He would ask when the next game was needed by and he would deliver."

Two wheels good

Thanks to the output of Messrs Estcourt and Brewster, 1984 proved to be a very successful year for Micromega. Slipstreaming Derek's *Codename MAT* was Mervyn's motorbike racer *Full Throttle*. "It was another killer game," notes Neil. "The gameplay was just amazing and the graphics were great, with those shimmering sprites. I remember we went to a Suzuki event and put on a little booth and Barry Sheene came over to play it and he said that the representation of the tracks was very good. I think Mervyn did own a bike, but he'd obviously never been

CLASS ACT

In a bid to broaden its appeal, Micromega looked to tap into the educational market. The problem was that Neil didn't know how best to proceed, so he forged a relationship with the Longman Group. He says of the joint venture: "We had credibility in the computing world, and Longman had credibility in the education world, so we had an arrangement where we designed and developed educational software and Longman marketed it and published it. The great thing about Longman is that it had the rights to use licensed characters like Postman Pat and SuperTed. The venture certainly didn't make a whole lot of money, but it was a nice way of diversifying out product range and had the effect of legitimising the rest of our business."

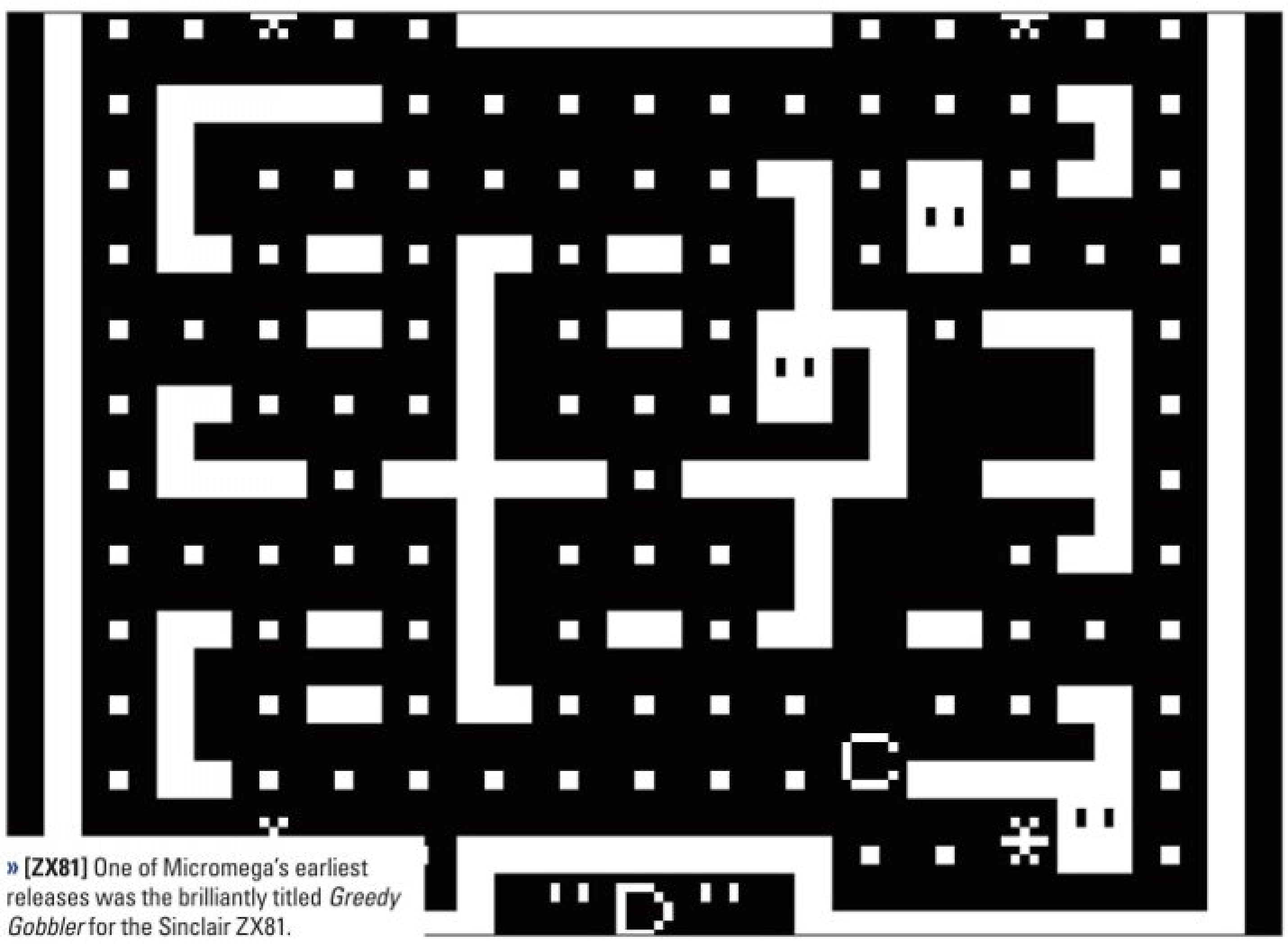
1983
NEIL HOOPER JOINS MICROMEGA AS SALES MANAGER. FURTHER FINANCE PROGRAMS ARE RELEASED FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM, DRAGON 32 AND GRUNDY NEWBRAIN, FOLLOWED BY A NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL FAMILY GAMES. THE FOCUS SOON SWITCHES TO ARCADE-STYLE GAMES. IN THE AUTUMN, *LUNA CRABS* (BY MERVYN ESTCOURT) AND *HAUNTED HEDGES* (BY DEREK BREWSTER) ARE BOTH RELEASED FOR THE SPECTRUM. THE YEAR ALSO SEES MICROMEGA DEVELOP SEVERAL EDUCATIONAL TITLES FOR THE LONGMAN GROUP.

1984
THE CLASSIC *DEATHCHASE* KICKS OFF THE YEAR IN STYLE. *CODENAME MAT* ARE *FULL THROTTLE* ARE BOTH RELEASED IN THE SUMMER, WITH THE LATTER HITTING NO.1 IN THE CHARTS AND BECOMING MICROMEGA'S BEST-SELLING GAME. OTHER RELEASES INCLUDE *BRAXX BLUFF*, *KENTILLA* AND *JASPER*, PLUS LICENSED EDUCATIONAL TITLES *SUPERTED* AND *POSTMAN PAT'S TRAIL GAME*.

1985
MICROMEGA STOPS ADVERTISING IN THE SPECIALIST PRESS. ITS LAST GAME, *A DAY IN THE LIFE* BY 21-YEAR-OLD NEWCOMER STEPHEN REDMAN, IS RELEASED IN MARCH 1985. SHORTLY AFTER QUANTEC WINDS DOWN THE DIVISION TO CONCENTRATE SOLELY ON BUSINESS APPLICATION SOFTWARE.

1986
ELITE SYSTEMS RE-RELEASES SEVERAL MICROMEGA GAMES (INCLUDING *DEATHCHASE* AND *FULL THROTTLE*) ON ITS 2.99 CLASSICS LABEL. AT ITS NEW LOW PRICE, *FULL THROTTLE* CLIMBS TO NO.6 IN THE SPECTRUM CHARTS. *SPEED KING* (THE C64 VERSION OF *FULL THROTTLE*) AND *KENTILLA* ARE PICKED UP BY MASTERTRONIC, WHO CONVERTS THE GAMES TO OTHER 8-BIT FORMATS AND SELLS THEM FOR £1.99.

1989
ZEPPELIN GAMES PICKS UP THE RIGHTS TO *DEATHCHASE*, *FULL THROTTLE*, *CODENAME MAT* AND *JASPER*, AND PUTS THEM BACK OUT ON THE SPECTRUM AT £1.99. *FULL THROTTLE* IS A NOTICEABLE SUCCESS ONCE AGAIN, AND CONVINCES ZEPPELIN TO COMMISSION A SEQUEL (WHICH WOULD EVENTUALLY APPEAR IN 1991).


» **[ZX81]** One of Micromega's earliest releases was the brilliantly titled *Greedy Gobbler* for the Sinclair ZX81.

on the tracks. He just looked at books and videos to get everything right."

Deathchase and *Codename MAT* both sold well, but they were eclipsed by the success of *Full Throttle*. The game powered to the top of the charts when released in August 1984. "I personally think *Deathchase* was Mervyn's cleverest game, but *Full Throttle* was the biggest seller," reveals Robin. "We sold around 90,000 copies of that. It was our best-selling title by miles. At its peak we were probably sending out 8,000 copies a week. By then Neil had sorted out all the production side of things, so we would send the purchase order to whoever was duplicating the tapes for us, they would send the tapes directly to the WH Smith warehouse in Swindon, and we would just send an invoice. We never even saw the tapes. It ran like clockwork."

Things were ticking along very nicely, but Robin had concerns about the speed at which sales cooled off. "What really shocked me was that over the period of about four to five weeks, sales went down from 8,000 a week to about 500. This was presumably when every kid in the country who wanted a copy of *Full Throttle* had got one. And that wasn't really the kind of business experience I could cope with." The idea of having a number one game one month and then seeing it disappear the next was completely at odds to the business software model where a successful application could generate income for years.

To meet the changing demands of the market, Micromega needed to pump out more hits and this meant cranking up the operation. Derek did his bit with a brace of very different games – colourful platformer *Jasper!* and text adventure *Kentilla*. Both titles hit in time for Christmas and were heavily promoted in the specialist press with full-page, full-colour adverts, but neither troubled the charts very much. Even back then, licensed titles like *Ghostbusters* and *Hunchback* were taking the bulk of Christmas sales.

Micromega had slightly more success with *Braxx Bluff*, a multi-stage arcade game with planar 3D graphics that looked very much like Mervyn's work. However, it was actually the first high-profile title by Tony Poulter, a programmer who had worked with Micromega since the beginning (he wrote some of the 1Kb ZX81 games). "Tony was a dyed-in-the-wool geek," laughs Neil. "He had long hair and a beard, and was always deep in code. Tony was a code bum before there were code bums."

The company also sought to expand its reach by porting its existing games to other platforms. The newly released Amstrad CPC was an obvious target as it was relatively easy to convert the Spectrum originals to the machine. A deal was done and *Haunted Hedges*, *Codename MAT* and *Braxx Bluff* were published through Amsoft. "We did some games for the CPC, but Amstrad was hard

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

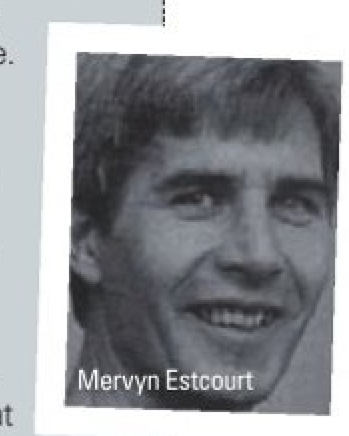
Robin Cooke-Hurle
Under Robin's control, Quantec Systems grew to become the biggest supplier of commercial taxation software in the UK with a staff of 75. In 1999 he sold the company to Sage. Since then he has worked with a number of small businesses in an advisory role or as an investor. "Not software businesses though," he states. "Been there, done that."


Robin Cooke-Hurle

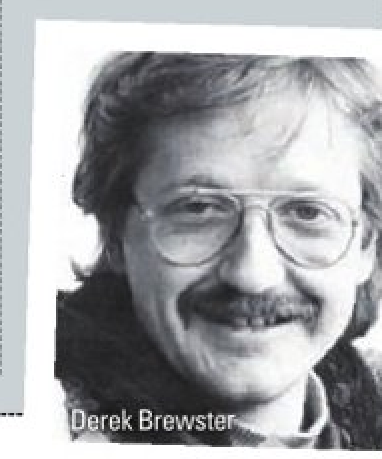
Neil Hooper
Following the closure of Micromega, Neil remained with Quantec for a year before leaving to join a networking company named Nestar Systems. He relocated to the US in the mid-Nineties and now works as a senior manager for Plantronics, a personal audio communications company based in Santa Cruz, California. Outside of work Neil plays bass guitar in a band (see **www.nigelandclive.com**).


Neil Hooper

Mervyn Estcourt The current whereabouts of Mervyn are sadly unknown. Since the very first issue of **RG**, we've tried and repeatedly failed to track down Mervyn Estcourt for a chat about his games. Apart from one entry on the 2002-2003 Electoral Roll (which listed him at an address in Cornwall where he no longer resides), there are seemingly no other leads. All we know is that he was living in Bristol in the early Eighties (the inset B&W photograph from an early issue of *Crash* magazine shows us what he looked like back then) and he would now be around 65 years old. If you know Mervyn, or have any information about him, please contact the mag!


Mervyn Estcourt

Derek Brewster
In addition to coding games, Derek also authored the Adventure Trail column for *Crash* magazine. Like Mervyn, we've been unable to track him down for a chat, despite contacting several of his old colleagues. It's believed that he may have worked as a university lecturer in Northern England at some point, but we have no further information.


Derek Brewster

to deal with," muses Robin. "I remember having to write to Alan Sugar to actually get paid."

The Commodore 64 proved to be a trickier prospect. In October 1984, Neil spoke to *Home Computing Weekly* and said: "Having firmly established ourselves in the Spectrum market, it's our intention now to provide Commodore owners with games of equal quality." Despite these intentions, Micromega only released one game for the C64, the Arabian-themed arcade game *Jinn Genie* by Hanan Samara. "We wrestled with the Commodore 64," says Neil now, "because it was clear it that was the other main machine in the market. Mervyn actually wrote *Full Throttle* for the Commodore 64 and offered it to us, and it was a brilliant version, but we declined to publish it. This was partly because it was at that stage in the industry where it was becoming expensive to effectively distribute games, and partly because Mervyn had become a bit of a superstar. We felt that the advance we would have to offer him was going to be more than we would get back. Our main nervousness wasn't that we didn't think the game would sell, but we weren't sure that we could sell it. We had credibility in the Spectrum market, but we were unknown in the C64 market, and it meant that we would have had to establish brand awareness and a new set of market relationships."

Full Throttle did eventually arrive on the C64 in late 1985, although it was titled *Speed King* and was published by Digital Integration, a company well known for its simulation software. That Mervyn had taken his game elsewhere was a moot point for Robin and Neil, as the pair had already made the decision to close Micromega in early 1985. The last title to be published was Sinclair send-up *A Day In The Life*, which was programmed for the Spectrum by 21-year-old newcomer Stephen Redman.

MORE THROTTLE

Such was the success of *Full Throttle* that two separate sequels were released. The first came courtesy of Mastertronic in 1987 and was bizarrely titled *Speed King 2* (the original *Full Throttle* was released as *Speed King* on the Commodore 64 and other formats, yet the sequel was a Spectrum-only release). The game was not coded by Mervyn Estcourt, but rather his Micromega pal Derek Brewster, who introduced a two-player split-screen mode to the otherwise fairly typical proceedings. Then in 1991, buoyed by the success of re-releasing the original game at just £1.99, Zeppelin Games put out *Full Throttle 2* on the Spectrum. The game was programmed by Michael Batty who told us: "It was based on Mervyn Estcourt's original but was supposed to have better graphics and sound and hills and things like that. In my opinion the original was better and more playable than mine, although mine had better music!" He also revealed that he cheekily cribbed some of the original's graphics routines: "I can remember working out where the offset tables for drawing the roads were by listening to the game load, then I just used the same ones!"

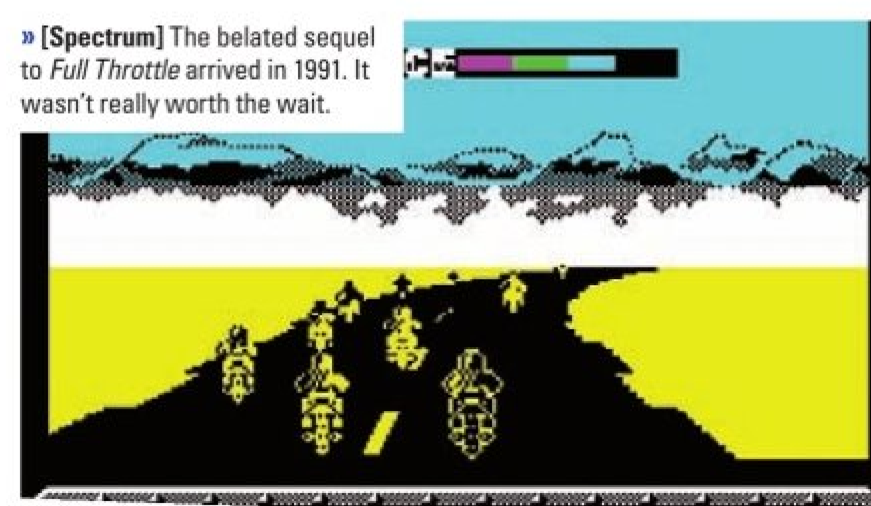
Winding down

Neil explains why they decided to call time on the operation. "Micromega was there to capitalise on an industry that clearly had very good margins without requiring major investment. So in 1985, after our second really good Christmas, I said to Robin that if we wanted to stay and compete in this market, we'd have to start making major investment rather than just capitalising on opportunity. And that was not what we were here to do. We were here to fund the development of Quantec's business software. So I pretty much agreed that we should pull the plug on Micromega, as it had done its job. Quantec had now launched a groundbreaking business program called QED, which was getting all kinds of corporate interest. It sounds a bit coldblooded, but it was a straightforward business decision."

"We never really had the infrastructure to develop new games," comments Robin. "Other software houses were being much more professional about it with their in-house operations. We projected a professional image externally, but internally it was basically a man and his dog. Or should I say Neil and his dog! We were basically just publishers. We got these games and punted them out. In some ways it's a pity we didn't carry on with



» [Spectrum] Sadly, Postman Pat can't run over the daft animal. It was a kids' game, after all.



» [Spectrum] The belated sequel to *Full Throttle* arrived in 1991. It wasn't really worth the wait.





» [Spectrum] Here's Blackjack on the Spectrum. A decent version of the game, but hardly a must-have title.



» [C64] Kentilla was later ported to the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64, with the C64 version featuring Rob Hubbard's excellent in-game tune.

SIX OF THE BEST



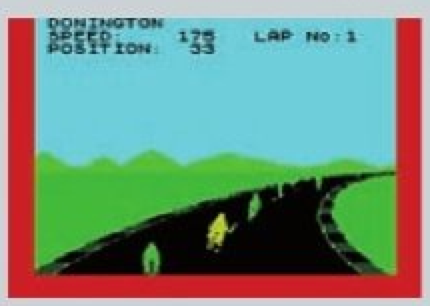
Luna Crabs (1983)

Back in the Eighties, if you weren't copying *Space Invaders* directly, you were creating variations on the alien-zapping theme. *Luna Crabs* is a neat little shooter where the killer crustaceans scuttle towards you, spitting deadly green goo at your lander.



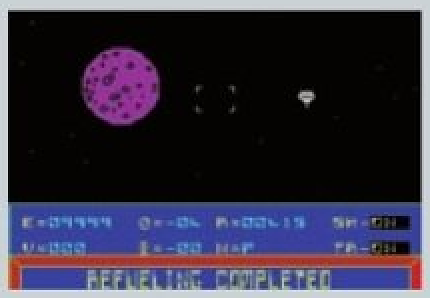
Deathchase (1983)

Probably the perfect Spectrum game. Unlike a lot of racing games, there's absolutely no need to ramp up the emulation speed or mess around with the controls. It plays as brilliantly now as it did on its release.



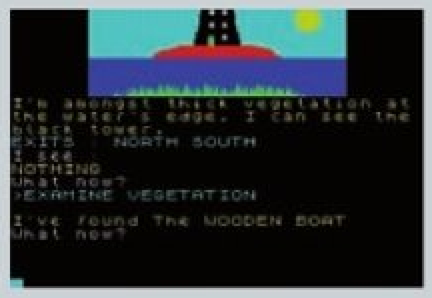
Full Throttle (1984)

This seemed to be on sale for much of the Spectrum's life, from its chart-topping debut to its release on various budget labels. It's a classy racer that's quick and challenging – providing you can look past the odd, flickering visuals.



Codename MAT (1984)

Influenced by *Star Raiders*, *Codename MAT* is a brilliant space adventure that rewards patience – getting your head around all of the controls can take a while. It's part shooter, part strategy game, with a prevailing sense of wonder and adventure.



Kentilla (1984)

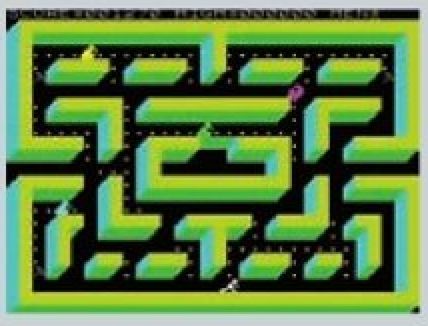
Cerebral text adventures don't spring to mind when you think of Micromega, but it did briefly deviate to publish this very decent Derek Brewster effort. Coupling clever puzzles with an intelligent parser, it's one of the top 8-bit adventure games.



A Day In The Life (1985)

Memorably referenced in the BBC's recent drama *Micro Men*, this arcade caper sees you take control of Clive Sinclair's bearded bonce and guide it to Buckingham Palace to receive a commendation from the Queen.

THREE TO AVOID



Haunted Hedges (1983)

There's nothing terrible about this early *Pac-Man* clone. It's just that the game was advertised as an innovative 3D twist on the classic, and yet in reality it's just *Pac-Man* with slightly skewed mazes to give the impression of depth. Jerky character movement pretty much sinks it.



SuperTed (1984)

It isn't fair to pick on any of the Longman collaborations, what with them being released as educational titles, but this deserves to be singled out. Featuring rubbish graphics, plodding gameplay and no discernable educational value, it would vex even the most patient four-year-old.



Jasper! (1984)

A surprising inclusion maybe, as this vibrant, well-animated platformer received plenty of rave reviews on its release. But time has not been kind to *Jasper*, and playing it now is a chore. It's too tough and most of the screens look the same, so there's little reason to persevere.



"We sold around 90,000 copies of Full Throttle. It was our best-selling title by miles"

ROBIN COOKE-HURLE ON MICROMEGA'S ONLY CHART-TOPPING GAME

the games, because we'd established a strong, sensible brand and we got pretty good at doing what we did. If Mervyn had sent in a sequel to *Deathchase* or *Full Throttle* we would have definitely published it. But I have no real regrets. I have good memories about the whole thing. As for the timing of when we got in and got out, I'd love to claim it was all carefully thought out, but there was an incredible amount of luck in all of it."



"We had a good time," concurs Neil. "We always put out good products and stood by them, but we weren't there to further the industry. If I went back now, as a mature, IT marketing professional, I would definitely do things differently. But that means I would probably screw it up. Our naivety and innocence were what made it work. When you don't know something's not possible you just go ahead and do it. That really was the nature of the time. Serendipity, timing, and good luck were everything. We got lucky with the product. We were very fortunate that Mervyn Estcourt and Derek Brewster came to us. There was no science to our talent acquisition!"

Readers may remember that Micromega's hits later resurfaced on various budget labels, compilations and cover-tapes. Sequels to Micromega properties like *Codename MAT* and *Full Throttle* also appeared on other labels. Even though the label had served its purpose, it would appear that the company was keen to profit from its former hits. Robin reveals that this wasn't the case, however, and they really did walk away from games. "We had one-page agreements with the authors and that was it. I think the rights reverted back to the authors once we pulled out, and even if they technically hadn't, we would have never objected or tried to sue anyone whatever the legal position. They were all good guys who'd done a hell of a lot for us."

This surprise admission is the perfect place to conclude to story of Micromega. It proves that sometimes software publishing isn't about making as much money as possible and milking the market for all it's worth. Sometimes it really is about the games and the supremely talented people who create them. And that's enough to make anyone misty-eyed and wistful.

IMPORT ONLY

» CO-ORDINATES: 35°41' N 139°46' E

GAME ORIGIN



- » **COUNTRY:** JAPAN
- » **POPULATION:** 127,433,494
- » **CAPITAL:** TOKYO
- » **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** JAPANESE
- » **CURRENCY:** YEN
- » **TIME ZONE:** GMT +9

INFO

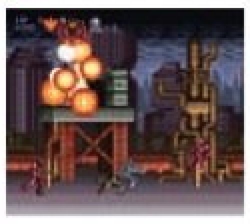


- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ARTS
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER NINTENDO
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £200

PRICE WATCH

» **Similar titles to splash cash on**

▲ More Expensive Than



SUPER PROBOTECTOR (AKA CONTRA III)
GET IT FOR: **£10**
So there are no side-scrolling space shooter bits (unless you count the motorbike section, of course), but if you're looking for R2's nearest contemporary than it has to be Konami's superb 16-bit entry in its *Contra/Probotector* series.

▼ Cheaper Than



METAL SLUG
GET IT FOR: **£1,000**
The most popular, expensive yet widely available obscure game of all time, the AES version of this legendary Neo Geo shooter can set you back an astounding £1,000 – many collectors would argue it's worth every penny.

RENDERING RANGER: R2

» Released in very small numbers in Japan, this title, which blends elements of Thunder Force, R-Type and Contra, is regarded as the Holy Grail of Super Nintendo gaming – but is it worthy of its lofty asking price? Stuart Hunt pawns his grandmother's wedding ring to find out

Most import titles will set you back a pretty penny, but it's the rare titles that will almost always command the tall asking prices. Usually when a game is rare, it's because it was produced in the same numbers as Fabergé Eggs, and this is because either it wasn't actually all that good, or was actually quite brilliant but its publisher saw it a risk and did a lacklustre job in seeing its full domestic appeal so only a few copies exist in the world. *Rendering Ranger: R2* (which we'll just dub *R2* from this point on) is an example of the former – it's a glorious-looking SNES shooter that was only snapped up by Virgin Interactive's Japanese arm and, as a result, tragically only saw limited release in Japan, with as few as several thousand copies manufactured according to some sources – which is why complete copies of the game can command asking prices as high as £200.

Designed by Manfred Trenz, *R2* is one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, but is also one of the machine's little-known import gems, showcasing some of the best 2D visuals you'll see from a Super Nintendo.

As such, anyone who argues that the Super Nintendo is not capable of doing frenetic shooters, and feels that they need more evidence than our *Axelay* feature in issue 80, should take the time to discover the game. Set against the backdrop of a bleak futuristic world under attack from a phalanx of mechanised menaces, *R2* is notable for mixing side-scrolling run-and-gun game sections with multiple scrolling space shooter bits, which both work to make it an epic, unique and varied shooter.

» [SNES] The game's opening stage includes an impressive use of Mode 7 scrolling, as this ship smashes through the stage.



The first section – the run-and-gun component – plays and looks very similar to Konami's Super Nintendo classic, *Contra III*. Assuming the role of a lone soldier who resembles one of the helmeted cops from NARC, you battle through a war-ravaged alien/robot world that



» [SNES] The game was only picked up by Virgin in Japan, hence its scarcity and asking price.



» [SNES] With its visuals, we think the game has a whiff of Amiga shooter about it.

GO DEEPER

What to look out for when playing Rendering Ranger: R2



> "R2 is widely known for being one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, and one of the machine's little-known import gems"



is teeming with all manner of biomechanical menaces. The graphics and sounds throughout *R2* are superb, with Trenz concocting a seemingly endless roster of enemies to fight and detailed scenery to ensure there is plenty of stuff to catch your eye, even in the backgrounds.

Along with the great visuals, memorable bosses and heavy rock soundtrack, *R2* also featured some awesome firepower. You can collect up to four different upgradable fire types over the course of the game, each with their own unique special attack that self-replenishes, and these can be switched on the fly to suit your situation.

Each of the nine stages in the game is wonderfully designed as well. The third stage, which is the first of the game's spaceship sections, riffs on *Thunderforce III*'s memorable lava stage, while Stage 6 pays fantastic homage to *R-Type*'s Bydo frigate boss/stage – but with players forced to weave in and out of the ship's insides to survive its attack.

If there is one criticism to level at the game, though, it's the difficulty. The game is extremely challenging, with wave after wave of enemies to vanquish, lengthy boss fights to survive and no continues to fall back on.



This hefty challenge culminates in the game's hair-tearing penultimate stage; a claustrophobic descent into a warren of underground tunnels, which requires superhuman reaction times and a dose of luck to get through alive.

When you consider how well the game marries together the two shooter sub-genres, it comes as a surprise to learn that *R2* was originally rumoured to be a straight space shooter. However, due to the popularity of the run-and-gun genre coupled with the huge success that Trenz had seen with *Turrican*, it was decided mid-development that the on-foot sections be added, and that the art style also be changed to hand-drawn pre-rendered sprites, as they were proving popular thanks to the likes of twilight 16-bit titles such as *Killer Instinct* and *Donkey Kong Country*.

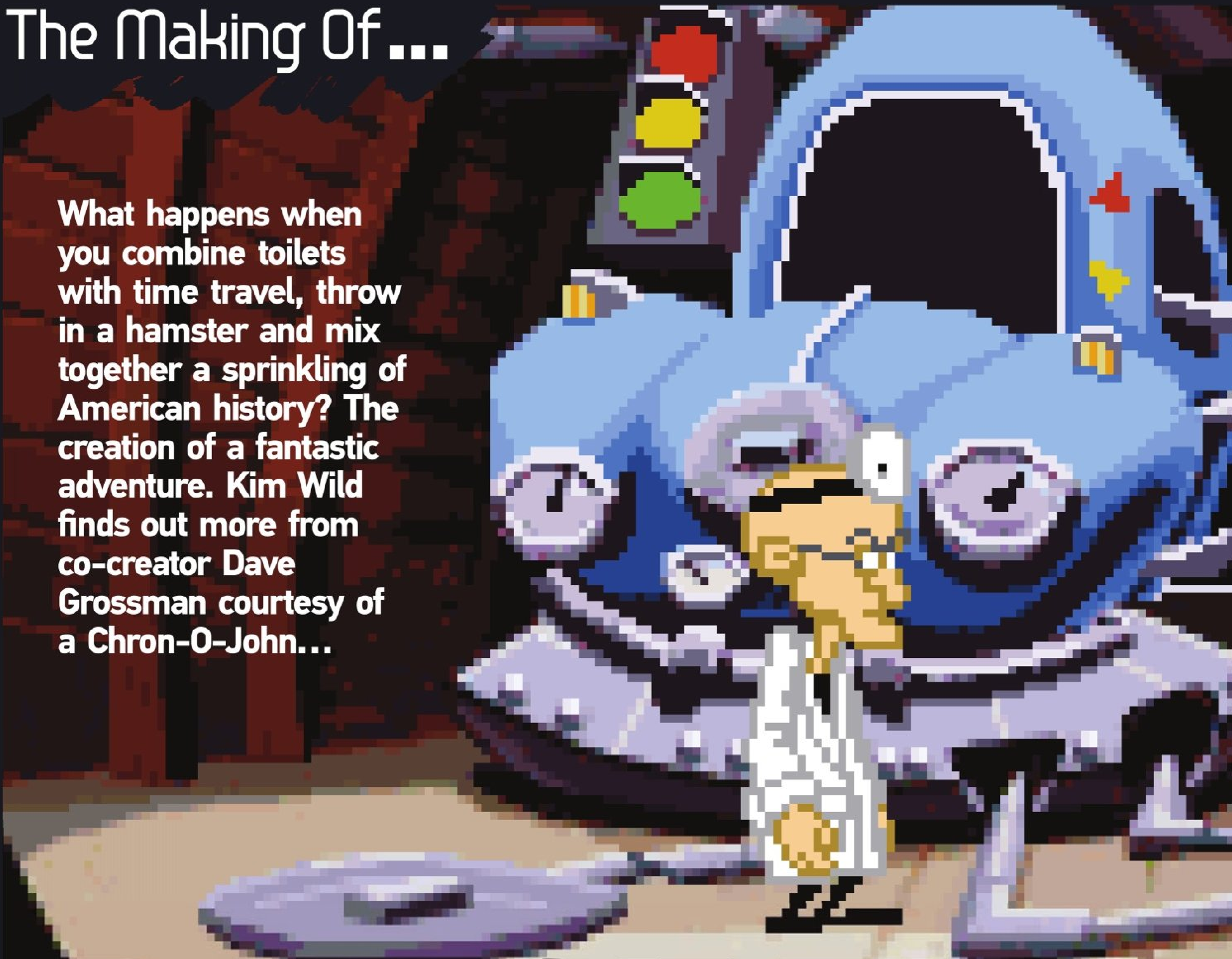
While these changes were to blame for the game's lengthy development, which caused its release to fall inside that chancy 1995 interim period between two console generations, Trenz's skill as a designer certainly shines through, masterfully binding together the two parts to create one of the most insane, challenging and sought-after shmups on Super Nintendo.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



TURRICAN

» *Turrican* caused a stir on its release, owing to its awe-inspiring visuals, free-roaming gameplay and excellent soundtrack. The game achieved things on humble microcomputers that many didn't think possible. If you want to experience Trenz at his best, then it has to be *Turrican*.



What happens when you combine toilets with time travel, throw in a hamster and mix together a sprinkling of American history? The creation of a fantastic adventure. Kim Wild finds out more from co-creator Dave Grossman courtesy of a Chron-O-John…

DAY OF THE



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** PC CD-ROM
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10-15

***Maniac Mansion* was the first adventure that LucasArts developed using the much-acclaimed SCUMM system, yet it would be some years before the emergence of a sequel.** It was a natural decision that originated due to the team being at a loose end. "It was kind of just hanging in the air, like a UFO or the smell of doughnuts," recalls Dave Grossman. "[*Monkey Island 2*] was winding down, and Tim and I were about as ready as we were going to be to run a project of our own. It had been in our minds as one of various things we might do, and I think the general perception among 'The Powers' was that keeping us together and having us do a sequel, however nominal, to something might help to minimise the damage that we might cause. I remember Kelly Flock bringing it up one day in a 'we were thinking you guys might want to do this' kind of way, and we said sure, absolutely. That sounded like just the ticket."



Day Of The Tentacle may have been a sequel, but Chuck Jones' cartoons proved inspirational for the style of the game, with classics such as *The Rabbit Of Seville*, *What's Opera, Doc?* and *Duck Dodgers In The 24½th Century* quoted by Grossman as particular favourites. "*Road Runner* cartoons have a very adventure game feel to them, but the most obvious influence on *Day Of The Tentacle* would be Pepé Le Pew, with its running gag about painting a white line on a black cat and having it be mistaken for a skunk. We lifted that verbatim and used it as a puzzle."

Having worked in various roles on LucasArts titles, most notably *Monkey Island* and its sequel, it was an ideal opportunity for Grossman to work on a project of his own alongside Tim Schafer, future creator of *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*. "Yes, Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick were around for the initial story planning and brainstorms," he recalls, "but Tim and I owned and wrote the project together. It was an excellent collaboration, pretty much an extension of how we worked together on the *Monkey* games, but with



GREEN VS PURPLE LET BATTLE COMMENCE

ITS BEEN AN important debate that has plagued the internet for years, kept adventure players awake at night and tormented the world over its sheer magnitude. Hours have been lost and work has been abandoned in the face of such a question. It's a matter of good versus evil at its best. Who is superior: Green or Purple Tentacle? The fate of the world is clearly hinging on the importance of such a decision. Grossman, rather diplomatically, chooses both: "That depends on what you plan to do with your afternoon. Time spent with Green Tentacle tends to broaden my musical horizons and make me feel good, but Purple is my go-to guy for world domination activities." Given our secret plans for world domination and converting everyone to the joys of retro gaming, we'd pick Purple Tentacle any day of the week.

TENTACLE

lots more areas of responsibility and accountability. There wasn't a whole lot of conflict in the relationship, we had similar tastes in a lot of ways, and if we disagreed, a quick conversation was usually enough to iron it out."

Day Of The Tentacle revolves around three main characters: Bernard (the only returning character from *Maniac Mansion*), Laverne and Hoagie. Purple Tentacle consumes radioactive waste, which transforms him into an evil genius, whom Dr Fred manages to capture alongside Green Tentacle. However, Bernard unwittingly releases them both, which leaves it down to Dr Fred to send the trio back in time. Yet Dr Fred's cheapskate ways soon catch up with him, when the imitation diamond powering the time machine cracks, leaving Bernard stranded in the present, Hoagie in the past and Laverne transported into the future. "A time machine is a really great design tool," adds Grossman philosophically. "I wish I could remember where I left it. Some future me probably came back and took it so I would stop causing trouble."

The time machine concept initially suggested by Ron Gilbert was fleshed out further by Tim Schafer, who came up with a unique concept of how the three characters would interact. "We tossed around ideas for what he'd use for the individual chambers," explains Grossman. "Someone suggested portable toilets, and Tim said it would be called the 'Chron-O-John', and we all laughed our heads off and we knew we wouldn't have to think about any other ideas. Once we'd arrived at the use of portable toilets, flushing things through time seemed sort of obvious."

Unlike *Maniac Mansion*, which featured six characters, the time-travelling antics of the storyline of *Day Of The Tentacle* meant it had to be scaled back. This meant that two characters, Razor and Moonglow, were abandoned while a third, Chester, was re-imagined as Red Edison's twin sons. Grossman explains these decisions: "In order to maintain our own sanity during production, we decided that we had better limit it to Bernard, Hoagie and Laverne, rather than allowing you to pick from a set. Lots more stuff was hand-animated than had been in *Maniac*, and the permutations of animating all those actions for all six characters would have killed us. Razor was the same hard-edged girl from *Maniac Mansion*, albeit with more pixels, colours and style, since we weren't developing for the Commodore 64 any more. Chester looked like Ned and Jed Edison, except he was black, with beat poet facial hair and a cup of espresso permanently attached to his hand. Moonglow was shortish, with sandals, baggy clothes and a cascade of frizzy curly hair. I was looking forward to writing dialogue for these people…"



Designing the characters themselves was a combined effort



between the creators and the artists involved with the project, as Grossman explains: "It seems to me that we first thought about what kinds of people they should be, and then Larry Ahern did concept drawings for them based on those thoughts, and then his drawings re-influenced our thinking about what kinds of people they should be. It's organic! We had several artists working for a year or so to create all that animation, which seemed like a lot at the time but by modern standards it's hardly notable. What was really amazing was watching Peter Chan crank out the backgrounds – he drew every last scene, and on each one he would go from concept sketch to finished art in about two days."



The introduction of CD-ROM meant that the biggest obstacle came from casting the voices for the characters. "We solicited and listened to a lot of demo tapes from voice actors – and yes, in 1992 they actually were cassette tapes – and made most of our selections that way," remembers Grossman. "Tamlynn [Barra], our voice director, spent a lot of time badgering Tim and I to describe how various characters should sound so she could locate people for us to listen to. Bernard was the toughest one to cast. I remember us going back and forth quite a bit, and I could sort of hear a voice in my head but I couldn't figure out how to describe it. Then there was a moment of epiphany and I realised that what I was imagining sounded like the character Les Nessman from *WKRP In Cincinnati*. Tamlynn surprised me by saying she thought we could get Richard Sanders himself to play the role, and that was that. And he was terrific!"

A floppy version of the game was also created to cater for those who had yet to upgrade to new technology, and this in itself posed its own challenges. "The main difference is that the floppy disk version of *DOTT* only talks during a couple of the major cut-scenes, instead of all the time," explains Grossman. "But even that is a lot of data, and I personally



» [PC] Must… give… Kim… pay rise.



» [PC] Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest mummy of all?





A HIDDEN MANSION

WHEN YOU PURCHASE *Day Of The Tentacle*, you're not just getting an excellent adventure game; you're getting two for the price of one. Squirrelled away on an in-game computer is the full version of *Maniac Mansion*, the predecessor to *Day Of The Tentacle*. "That actually happened because of a bug," explains Grossman. "There was an animation that was crashing, and I noticed the file was just slightly larger than 64k and wondered if the SCUMM system had a hard limit on the size of an animation. Turns out it did, and while I was discussing this with Ron Gilbert, he started to reminisce about the technical limitations of the old days, in that way that all computer people do, and said that the entire game of *Maniac Mansion* had to fit into 64k in order to run on the Commodore. 'Wow, that's small,' we all said. So small that it seems like it would be easy to tuck it into a corner of *DOTT*. Aric Wilmunder did it – he wrote a bunch of code to essentially tape the two games together, while the rest of us sat around and applauded when it was done."



"A time machine is a really great design tool! I wish I could remember where I left it"



» [PC] Laverne's twisted responses to each interaction are one of the highlights of the character.



» [PC] An assortment of American historical figures feature, including Franklin, Washington and Jefferson.



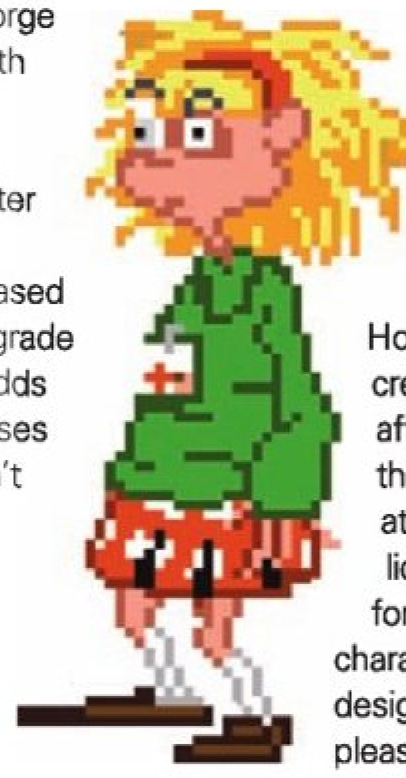
» [PC] There just isn't the appreciation for fine literature these days.

spent several weeks at the end of production, looking for ways to shrink or eliminate files so that the game would still fit on six disks with the voice in it."

Although the game may have been restricted to three characters featured in the past, present and future, it meant that many of the puzzles had to be written specifically with time travel in mind. To us, this sounds particularly difficult to pull off, but Grossman disagrees: "You would think so, because time travel stories are always so mind-bending, but it wasn't actually particularly more challenging than adventure game design usually is – good adventure game design *is* quite challenging, make no mistake about that. With a time travel story, I leave a bottle of wine somewhere, and it causes a bottle of vinegar to appear in the same place four hundred years later. Same basic idea: I do X over here, and it causes Y over there. Whether 'over there' means in the next room or 400 years in the future is irrelevant. I will say that it was really fun to think about the effects of large amounts of time on things like wine bottles and sweaters in dryers, and to imagine how altering fundamentals of history like the Constitution and the flag could be used to accomplish petty, selfish goals like the acquisition of a vacuum and a tentacle costume. We definitely enjoyed ourselves designing that game."

Writing the dialogue itself, the bulk of which is incredibly witty, was something that, for Grossman at least, was easier to envisage while alone: "I find it hard to do dialogue in a group, I think because the part of my brain I use to listen to people is the same part I use to listen to the characters in my head. Nearly all of the dialogue in *Tentacle* was written after five o'clock, when people had begun to leave the building."

Although *Day Of The Tentacle* excels with its comedy, the assortment of American history that is scattered throughout the game not only strengthens its storyline but is instrumental in setting up fantastic puzzles. Who could forget painting a tree red to trick George Washington into cutting it down so Laverne could be set free? Summoning a storm by washing a dirty carriage so Ben Franklin could finally discover electricity with his kite? Replacing George Washington's false teeth with a chattering set so a fire could be lit? "I did do some research, but mostly only after we'd already formulated a bunch of half-baked ideas based on our dim recollections of grade school American history," adds Grossman. "I think the phrases 'close enough' and 'it doesn't matter' were used quite a bit. Still, I do like to know how close we come to the facts, so I made a few phone calls." Placing Ed's long-suffering hamster – poor little guy – in the ice machine for future use and Laverne's need to enter Dead Ted into a beauty pageant also stand out as memorable inventive puzzles. "Freezing the hamster came from a desire to have a callback to the hamster-in-the-microwave moment from the original *Maniac Mansion*. And the 'pageant' just seemed natural for a kind of *Planet Of The Apes* future where humans are pets. I'm not sure any of us had ever even been to a dog show, so we just based it on what we thought they would be like. And then about eight years later the movie *Best In Show* came out and confirmed all of our suspicions."



Since the release of *Day Of The Tentacle*, Grossman time-shifted away from adventures to other projects within LucasArts before he left the company to work at Humongous Entertainment, writing for the *Pajama Sam* series. These days, he's settled down quite nicely at episodic adventure game specialist Telltale Games. How does it feel to still be creating point-and-click titles after all these years? "One of the things we do very well at Telltale is choose which licences to work on, looking for rich worlds and entertaining characters, and that makes the design and writing easier and more pleasurable. I think I'll stick around."



» [Spectrum] *3D Tank Duel*



» [Spectrum] *3D Ant Attack*


» [C64] Be


» [C64] *F.L.A.K.*


» [C64]



» [C64] *Gyropod*



» [Spectrum] Hora

Soft Aid

SUPPORT A GOOD CAUSE WITH THIS GREAT COMPILATION

» RETROREVIVAL



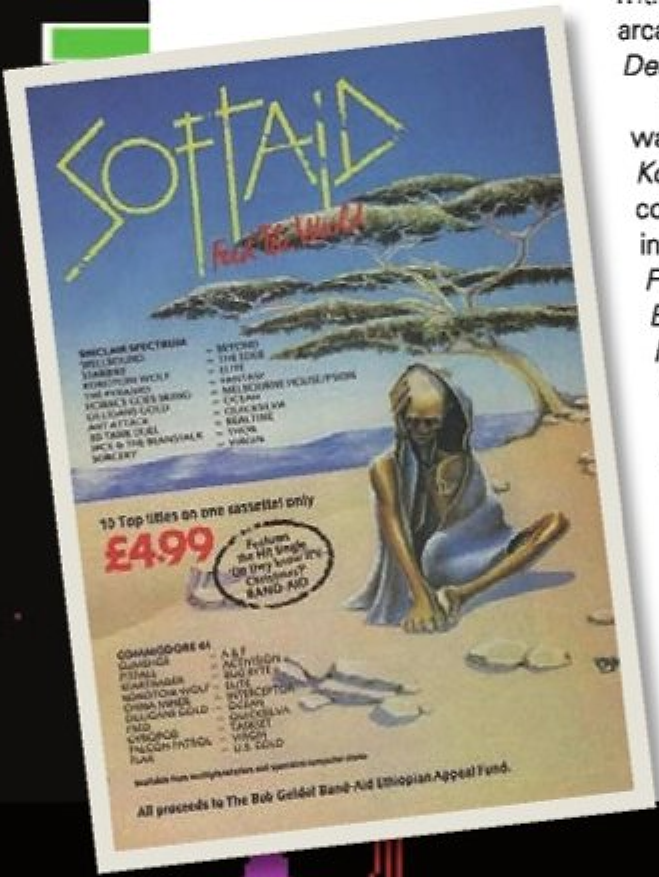
» SPECTRUM/C64
» QUICKSILVA
» 1986

Compilations have always represented fantastic value for money, but when one comes along that actually helps a noble cause it becomes even harder to turn down. Inspired by the tireless and selfless work of Bob Geldof and Midge Ure's Band Aid project, Quicksilva rallied together a selection of software giants ranging from Ocean and Elite to Beam Software and Virgin Games to create an impressive collection of ten popular games that would also raise money for Ethiopia's Famine Relief.

David Rowe, who had done such a stunning job with the cover for Sandy White's 3D *Ant Attack*, was drafted in to draw the iconic cassette cover, Band-Aid's 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' was included as a bonus and the whole package was available to both Commodore 64 and Spectrum owners for a very reasonable £4.99.

It would have been all too easy for Quicksilva to simply churn out a collection of any old tat and hope that the cause itself would be a strong enough seller, but it instead delivered a solid product with plenty of great games.

The Spectrum offering featured Quicksilva's very own *Ant Attack*, the excellent *Starbike* and *Horace Goes Skiing*, fun platformers *Gilligan's Gold*, *Kokotoni Wilf* and *Jack And The Beanstalk* along with *Q*bert* clone *Spellbound*, shooter *The Pyramid*, arcade adventure *Sorcery* and Battle Zone clone *3D Death Tank*.



By comparison, the Commodore 64 compilation was completely different with only *Gilligan's Gold* and *Kokotoni Wilf* making an appearance. The rest of the compendium consisted of a selection of shooters including *FLAK: The Ultimate Flight Experience*, *Falcon Patrol*, *Gyropod* and Activision's superb *Beamrider*, platforming fun in the form of *Gumshoe*, *Fred* and *China Miner* and Bug-Byte strategy title *Star Trader*.

We'll admit to being bigger fans of the Spectrum offering, but that's mainly due to the fond memories with have of constantly playing *Starbike* and *Gilligan's Gold* around a friend's house whenever the opportunity arose. Regardless of your system allegiance, *Soft Aid* was an essential compilation and the fact that it was all in the name of a good cause simply made the deal all the sweeter. ✱



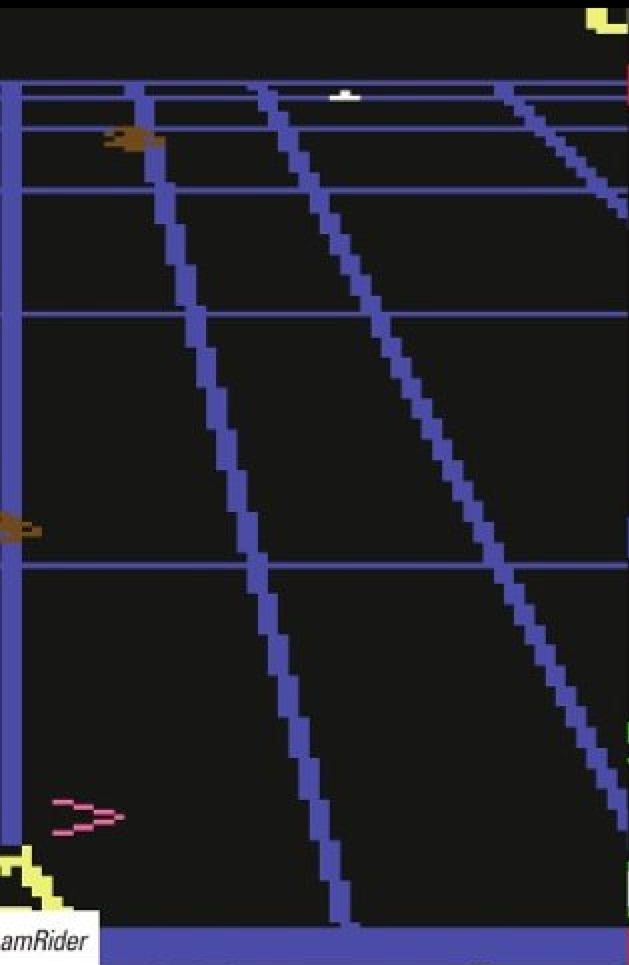
» [Spectrum] *Sorcery*



» [Spectrum] *Spellbound*



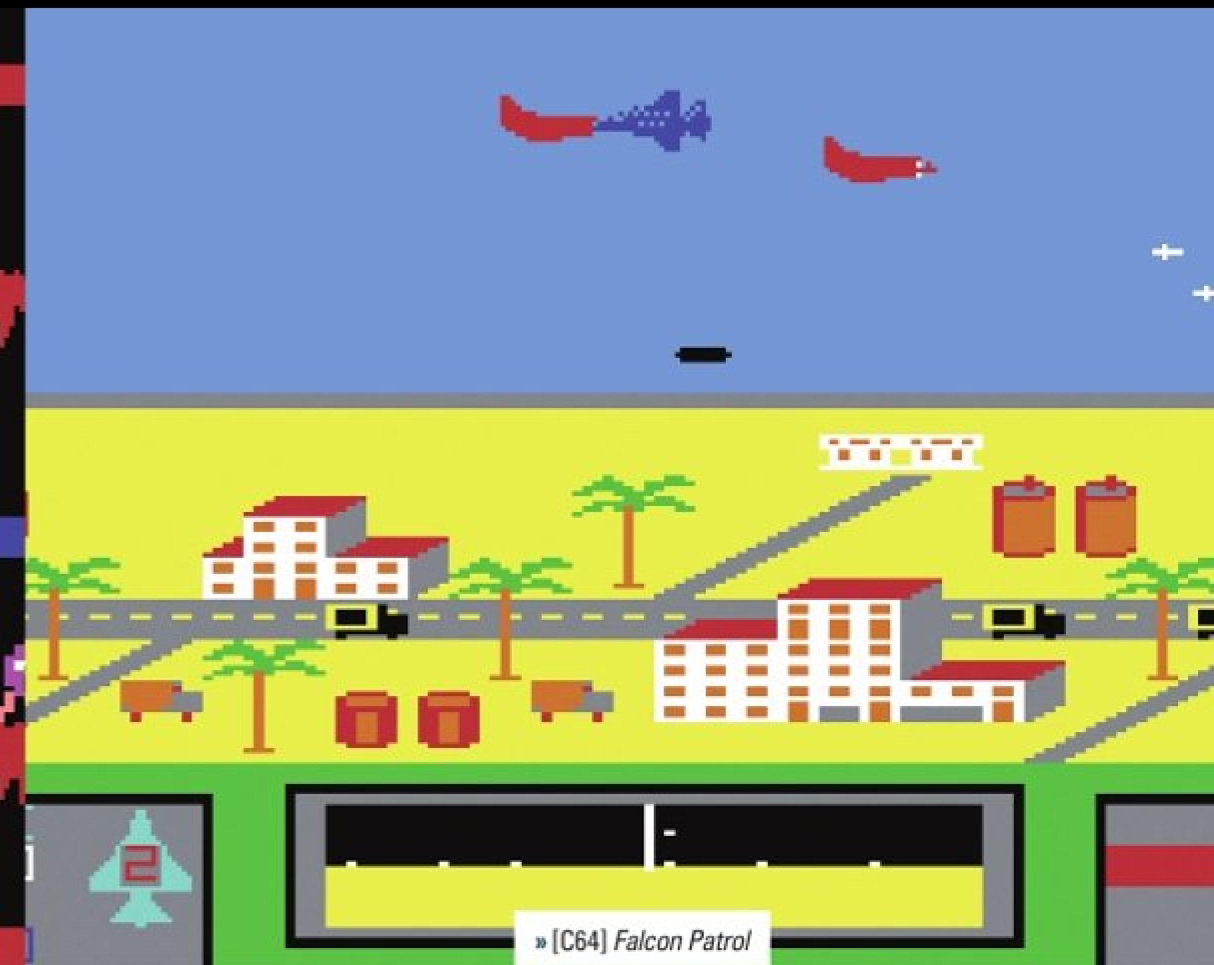
» [C64] Sta



amRider



» [C64] China Miner



» [C64] Falcon Patrol



Fred



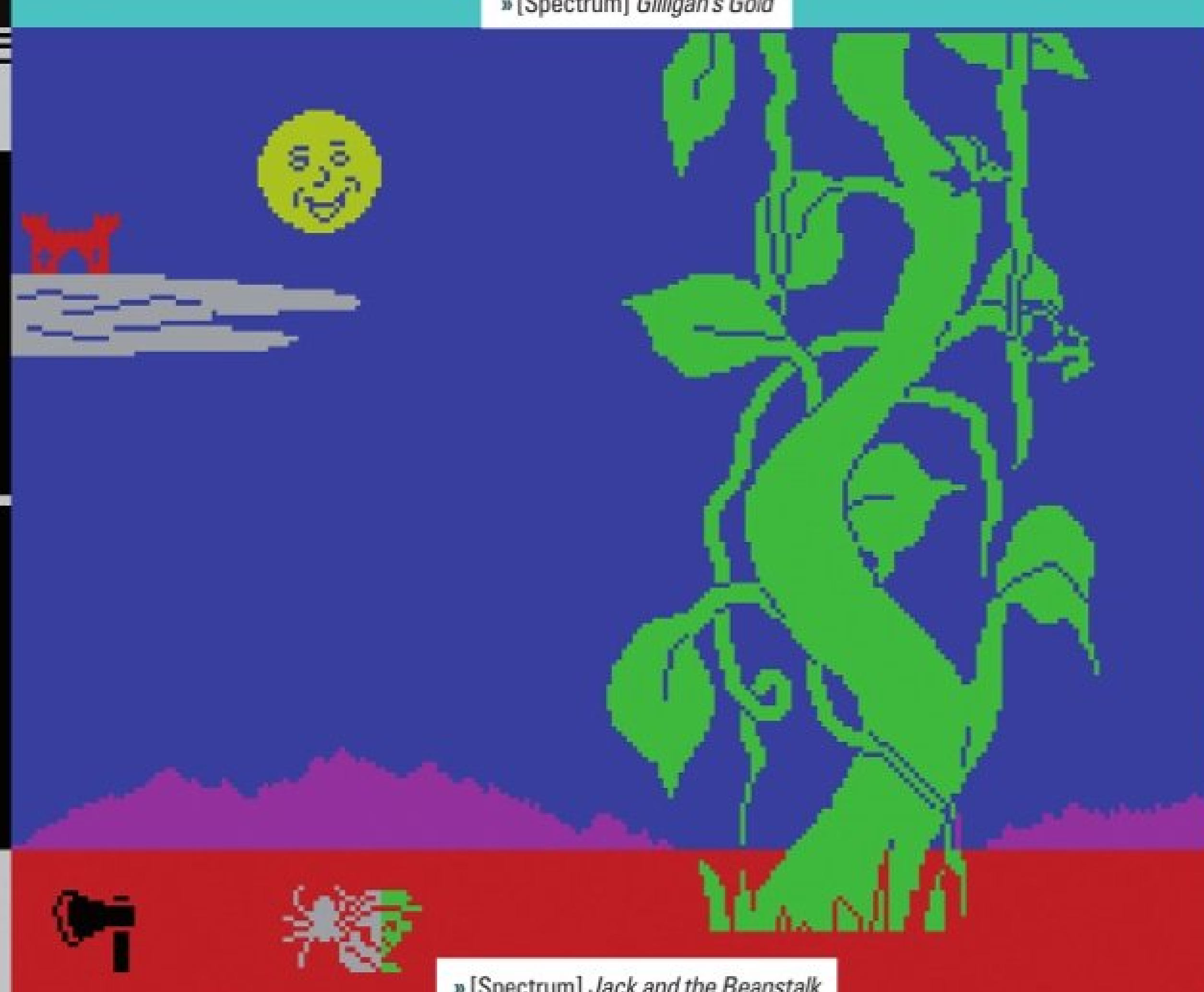
» [Spectrum] Gilligan's Gold



» [C64] Gumshoe



ace Goes Skiing



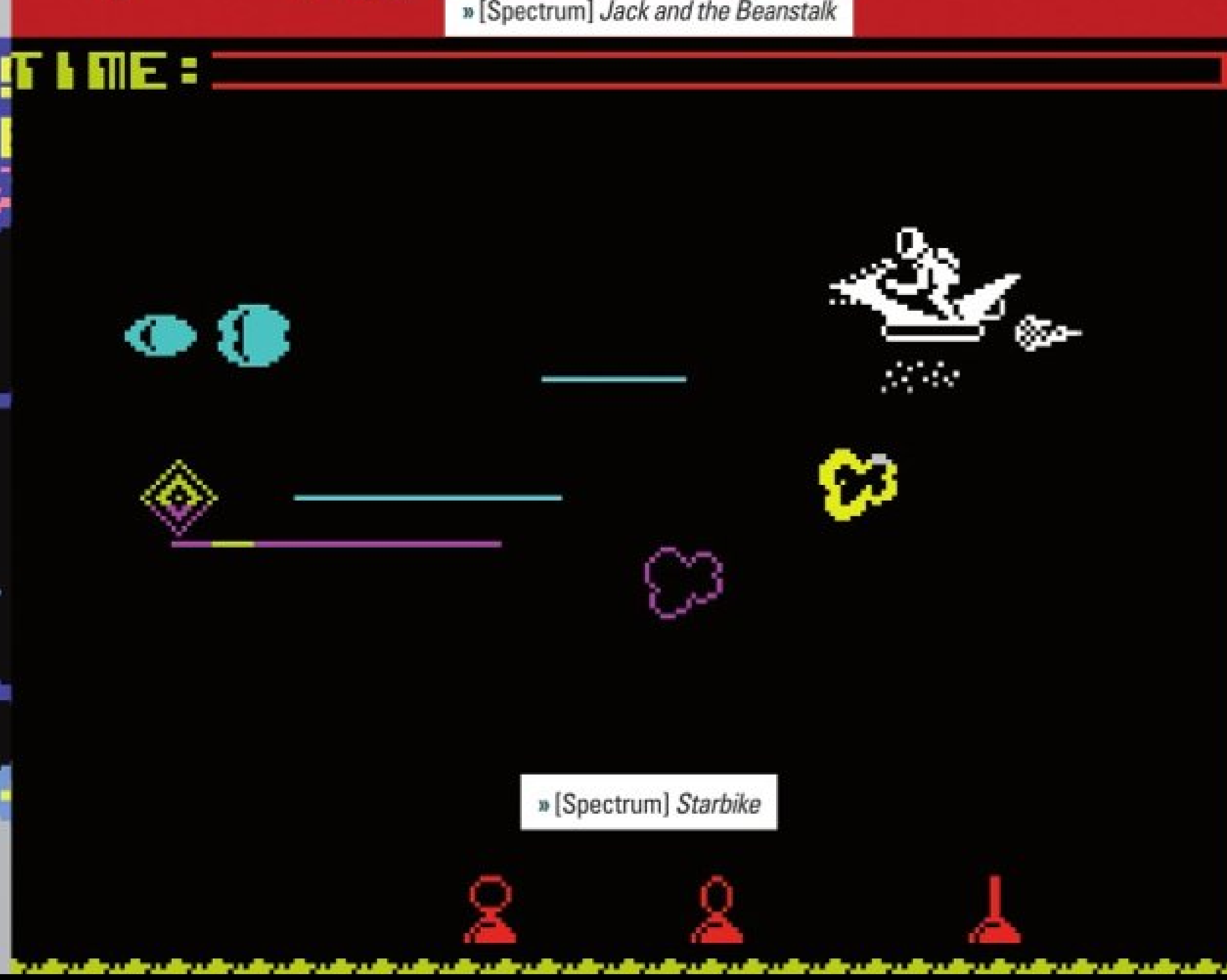
» [Spectrum] Jack and the Beanstalk



» [Spectrum] Kokotoni Wilf



ar Trader



» [Spectrum] Starbike



» [Spectrum] The Pyramid

RETRORATED



>> It's another download-heavy month this issue thanks to a great new Castlevania game, an update of last year's Alien Breed: Evolution and the wonderful and much-hyped Limbo on Xbox Live. Basically there's something retro-themed for everyone to enjoy

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair
It's a grind fest, but I can't get enough of *Castlevania*.



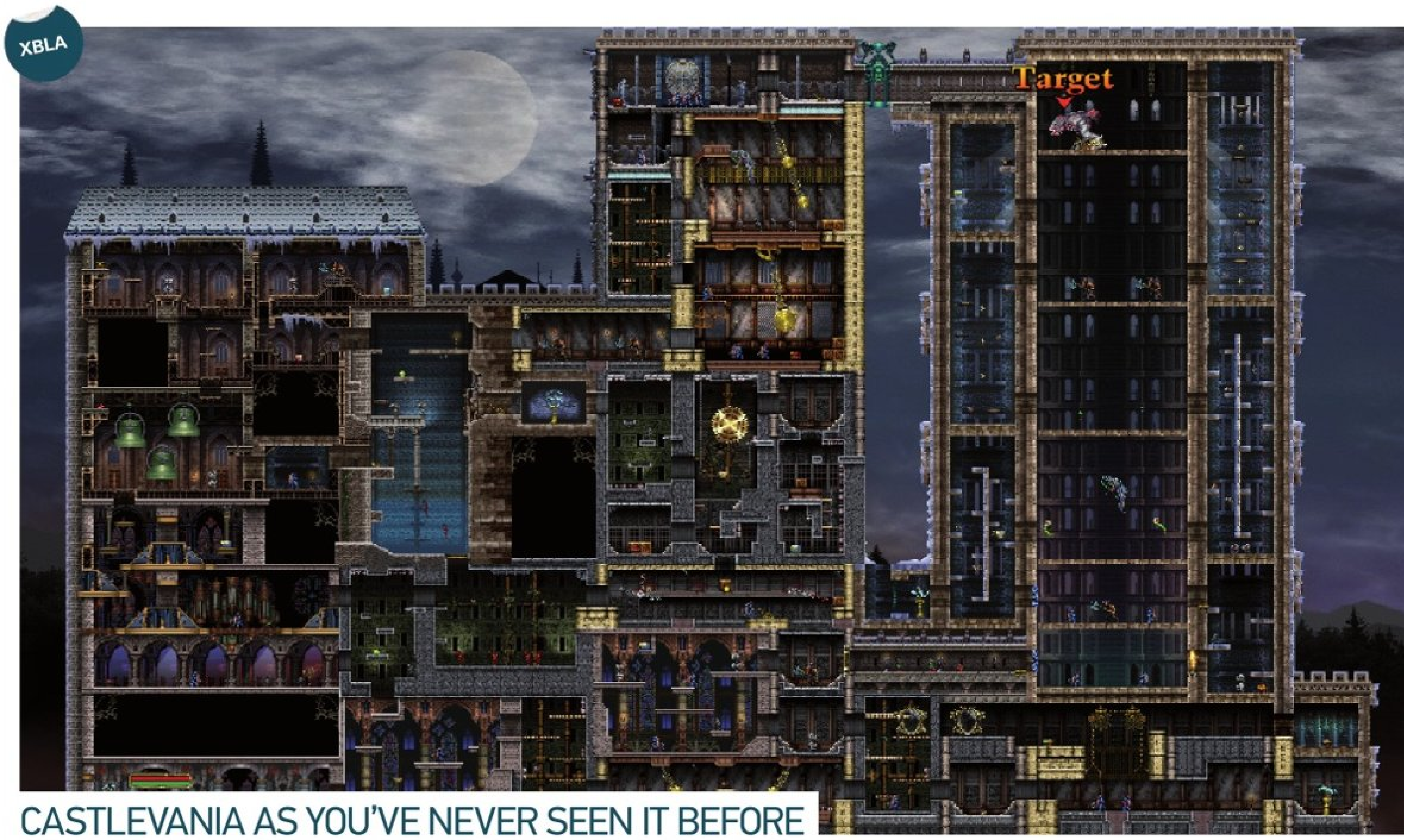
STUART
Scott Pilgrim vs The World
Harking back to the classics, I've been enjoying *Scott Pilgrim*, aka *Toronto City Ransom*.



DAVID
Rayman 2
I've been getting back to grips with Ubisoft's superior sequel. It still plays brilliantly.

>> CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DESPAIR

XBLA



CASTLEVANIA AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

» [XBLA] The entire first level in all its high-definition glory. The boss will randomly fire out dangerous lasers as you fight through the stage.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-6

BRIEF HISTORY

» Konami's *Castlevania* franchise has been entertaining gamers for 24 long years. Initially focusing on the Belmont family's eternal struggle with Count Dracula, the series has changed in recent years, with this multiplayer effort the latest in a line of successful efforts to revitalise the formula.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
GAUNTLET (ARCADE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
DEAD RISING (XBOX 360)



Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair



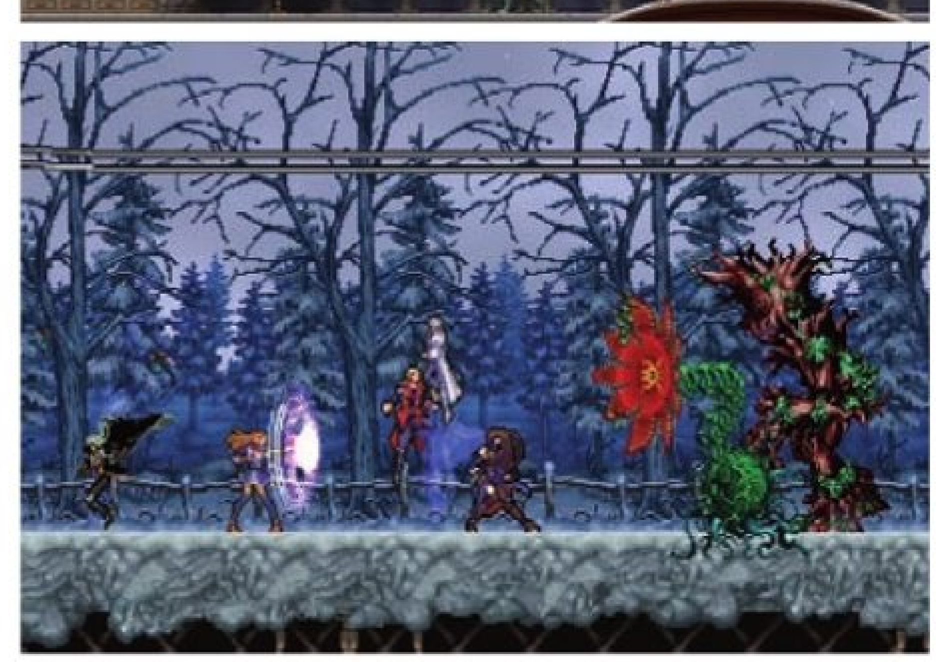
When *Symphony Of The Night* appeared in 1997 it created a template for the series that Konami has doggedly used ever since. As a result, the series has become a little stale, and while we've enjoyed every GBA and DS release, we'd still like to see a little bravery on the part of Konami.

Portrait Of Ruin was certainly a step in this direction due to it introducing a second player, but this new downloadable outing takes the series on a bold new path that is bound to delight and infuriate fans of the gothic franchise in equal measure.

At its heart, *Harmony Of Despair* is all about the big grind. At the beginning of each of its six stages you're presented with an absolutely enormous playing area that can be zoomed in as the player sees fit, and you must seek out and defeat its huge mayor. If you die – and you will, many times, in fact – you'll be immediately sent back to the beginning of the stage and your progress, or lack thereof, will be saved.

Unlike similar dungeon crawlers, *Harmony Of Despair* allows you to keep all the money and items that you amassed. This means that once you restart, you'll





» [XBLA] The franchise is known for its blatant reuse of sprites, and *Harmony Of Despair* is no different.



» [XBLA] Boss encounters are suitably ramped up when playing with friends, so a challenge is assured.

instantly have an advantage. As with Capcom's *Monster Hunter*, you don't level up your character, but instead level up your weapons and armour, allowing you to get deeper and deeper into the game. It's a refreshing new change of direction for the series, and while revisiting the stages may sound boring, their clever design and the speed with which you can eventually complete them means that it never becomes an issue.

Where *Harmony Of Despair* excels is in the sheer amount of depth that it actually offers. There are five characters available – somewhat strange considering that it's a six-player game – and each and every one of them plays completely differently to each other. Alucard, for example, provides raw power thanks to the huge number of different weapons he can buy and discover, while Shanoa can steal magic abilities from the many monsters you face. It all adds greatly to the core game, offering a depth that just isn't available in the normal handheld editions.

Of course, the real focus of these distinct characters is to offer a more involved experience when playing online. Up to six players can tackle each stage, and while it's possible to all select the same character, it pays to balance out the party, just as you would in a typical online game. Numerous chests are scattered around each large stage, and certain ones can only be accessed by specific characters or involved teamwork. It's a testament to the level design that the stages never feel a chore to play through, whether you're on your own or with a full team of friends.

Unlike more recent *Castlevania* adventures, it's impossible to equip items on the fly. Instead you must find checkpoints in the level to enhance your character. It initially feels unnatural, but as checkpoints are never far away it never becomes an actual issue.

Despite being billed as a multiplayer game, *Harmony Of Despair* is perfectly playable on your lonesome and we actually appreciate the challenge it offers. There's no doubt that the grinding will be an issue for some, and the later bosses can feel incredibly unfair at times, but this is a solid addition to the series and one we definitely hope Konami expands upon in the future.

OPINION



Those who aren't fans of grinding will probably have a tough time with this latest *Castlevania*. That said, the variety of characters, multitude of items, and the excellent new multiplayer direction are sure to be warmly welcomed.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

Perfectly acceptable as either a single or multiplayer adventure, *Harmony Of Despair* is an interesting new addition to the series that takes the franchise in bold and exciting directions. More please, Konami.

>> Scores

Presentation	**70%**
Graphics	**78%**
Sound	**88%**
Playability	**86%**
Addictivity	**90%**

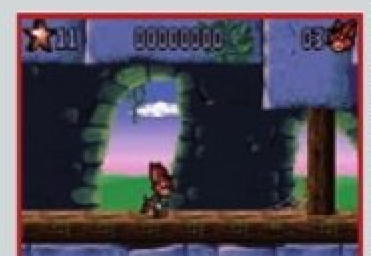
Overall 87%

✱VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Interest in the Virtual Console continues to dwindle with Nintendo seemingly more interested in releasing new WiiWare titles each week. It's a real shame, as there are still plenty of great games out there on these systems that we'd like to see coming out on the service.



Aero The Acro-Bat 2
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800 Points
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆
» The Nineties were rife with annoying anthropomorphic animals, and *Aero The Acro-Bat* was no exception. Interestingly the sequel is quite good fun, easily eclipsing the bland original. The only thing against it is the sheer quality of platformers already available on the Virtual Console.

Wild Guns
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800 Points
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

▼ PLAYSTATION NETWORK

After last month's poor showing, Sony bounces back with a decent number of PlayStation titles available to download and play on both your PS3 and PSP. We're still dawdling far behind the US and Japan in terms of library size, but this is a good range of games that covers a solid set of genres.

Disney And Pixar's Toy Story Racer
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Points:** £5.49
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Pong
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Points:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Tekken 2
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Points:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆



Rayman 2: The Great Escape
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Points:** £3.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆
» While not as polished as the N64 or Dreamcast versions, this is still a great version of Rayman's best adventure. Full of Gallic charm and featuring cleverly designed levels, all gamers should experience this game.

▼ GAME ROOM

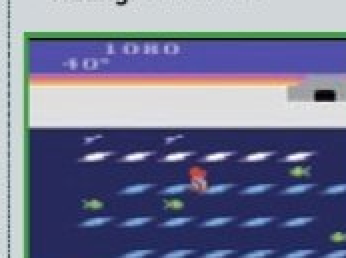
We know that this is a long-haul project for Microsoft, but this month's Game Room sees us lose a large amount of faith in the project. Where are the other publishers, Microsoft? This needs to evolve, and quickly.

✱ All games are 240 Points

Activision Decathlon
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

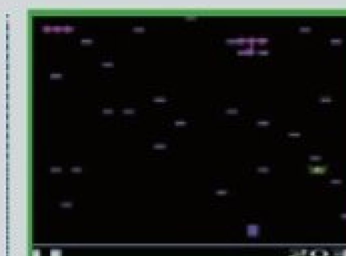
Asteroids
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Auto Racing
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



Frostbite
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆
» Activision has been the saviour of Game Room, delivering quality Atari 2600 titles that make the rest of the line-up look exceedingly shabby. *Frostbite* is no exception, being a wonderful take on *Frogger* that features tight controls and fast and frantic gameplay.

Jail Break
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



Centipede
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆
» No, no, no, Microsoft. Stop giving us inferior versions of arcade games that are already available on Game Room. It's completely pointless, clutters up the service with unneeded tat and isn't going to net you any cash. We need new publishers, not inferior rehashes of games that you've already given us. Surely you're not running out of new games already?

3-D Tic-Tac-Toe
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Beamrider
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Cosmic Commuter
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Thin Ice
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Dodge 'Em
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Dolphin
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Dragster
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Hockey
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Super Pro Decathlon
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Chip Shot Golf
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Freeway
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

>> GUNDEMONIUM COLLECTION

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSN
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £9.99 OR £3.99 EACH
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY ENTERTAINMENT ONLINE
- » **DEVELOPER:** ROCKIN' ANDROID
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

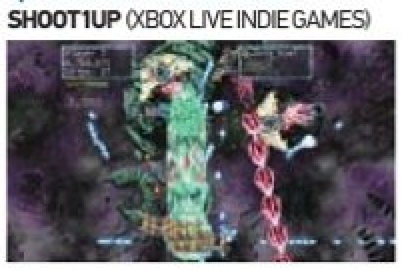
» Although best known for its manic shmups, Platine Dispositif has dipped its toe into a number of genres since forming in 2004. In addition to shoot-'em-ups it has created titles like platformer *Bunny Must Die: Chelsea And The 7Devils* and RPG *Dicing Knight Period* for the WonderSwan Color.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
MARCHEN ADVENTURE COTTON (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
SHOOT1UP (XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES)



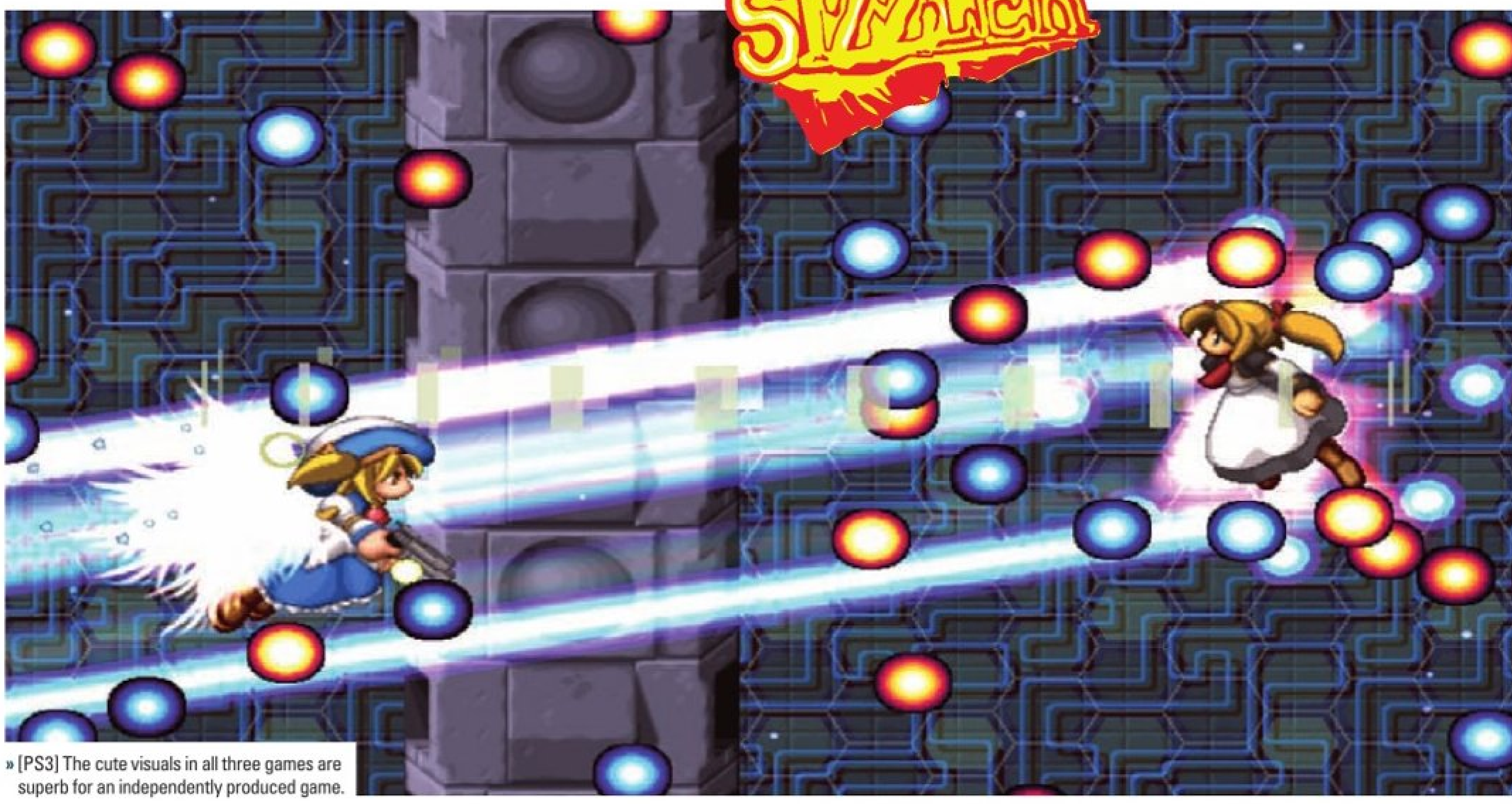
GO DEEPER

The facts behind Gundemonium Collection

>> *Gundemonium* was originally released on the PC in 2004. The *Gundemonium Collection* first appeared on the PC in 2007

>> Although *Hitogata Happa* is the last game in the trilogy, it's actually set before *Gundemonium*

>> *Hitogata Happa* is the only game in the series that scrolls vertically. It's also the only title to feature the cool-looking self-destructing dolls



» [PS3] The cute visuals in all three games are superb for an independently produced game.

THREE GREAT SHOOTERS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

Gundemonium Collection



Typical, isn't it? You wait ages for some decent shmups to appear and three come along at once.

Originally created by shmup expert Platine Dispositif and converted to PSN by Rockin' Android, *Gundemonium Collection* is a great compilation consisting of *Gundemonium Recollection*, *GundeadliGne* and *Hitogata Happa*. Beautifully styled and with some truly stunning music, it's a wonderful collection that features clever scoring mechanics, plenty of inventive bosses and some gorgeous bullet patterns to weave through.

Gundemonium Recollection, itself an enhanced remake of *Gundemonium*, is the first game in the collection and perfectly sets up the background for this highly imaginative series, which focuses on an alternate 18th Century full of bullet-spewing pumpkins and bunny girls riding missiles. It's a loopy story, to be sure, but unlike many shooters, you'll find yourself reading through the large amounts of tiny text to discover how it all ends.

Taking the form of a horizontal scroller, *Gundemonium* is a tough-as-nails shooter that features insane bullet patterns and plenty of neat mechanics.

GundeadliGne follows on directly and again scrolls horizontally; it's the most accessible of the three games thanks to a kinder difficulty level and the introduction of a second player. Another neat feature is the ability to flip direction to take care of the many enemies that sneak up behind you. While hardly a new idea – it appears in everything from *Section Z* to *Deathsmiles* – it fits the game perfectly.

The final game in the trilogy is actually set before the other two and takes the form of an insanely tough vertical shooter. It's also the most inventive and definitely worth persevering with. You start off with a supply of ten dolls. Grazing bullets and destroying enemies raises your flow bar, which, once filled, allows you to turn your doll into a bomb. Dolls boast special abilities and can be purchased at the end of each stage. It's also possible to switch your line-up to choose a doll for the most relevant situation. Add in 'zone of control', which allows you to slow down bullets when you enter specific circled areas, and *Hitogata Happa* becomes an incredibly rewarding game, even if its difficulty will have you swearing like a grizzled old seadog.

While available separately for £3.99 each, we'd recommend you pick up the entire collection, as it represents great value for money. It's rare enough that big companies get behind projects like this, so show your support and purchase this wonderful little collection as soon as you can. It may lead to even more shmup opportunities in the future.



» [PS3] While none of the games are pushovers, *GundeadliGne* is the easiest to get into.

OPINION

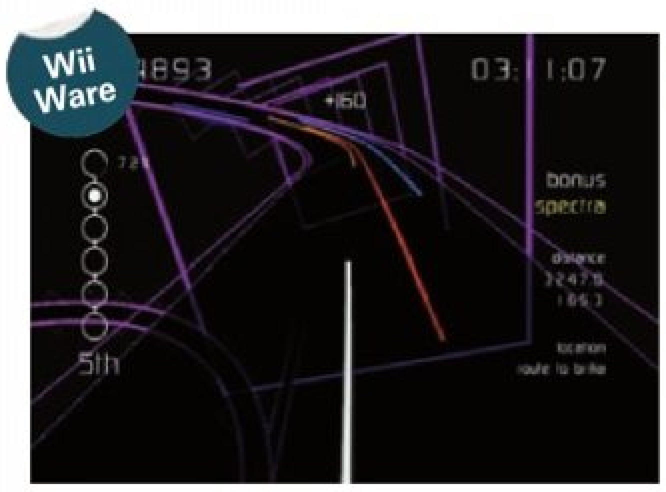


Bullet hell certainly isn't for everyone, but *Gundemonium Collection* is nevertheless a solid compendium of great blasters. There are some inventive bosses, plenty of intricate bullet patterns to master and some great gameplay mechanics.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

Presentation	**75%**
Graphics	**82%**
Sound	**88%**
Playability	**91%**
Addictivity	**92%**
Overall	**90%**



Art Style: Light Trax

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 600 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **First released on** the Game Boy Advance in the form of *Dotstream*, *Light Trax* is a sublime little update and a refreshing take on traditional racing. Taking control of a beam of light that always moves at a predetermined speed, you boost yourself by drafting behind other beams of light or by overtaking them. It's a glorious little system wrapped up in beautiful *Tron*-style visuals. Well worth the 600 Point asking price.

>> Score **83%**



Puzzle Quest 2

» **SYSTEM:** STEAM
» **PRICE:** £12.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **The original *Puzzle Quest*** was an immensely satisfying blend of adventuring and match-three puzzling, so it's pleasing to see that this fun sequel follows suit. Action gems are the biggest addition, as matching them together grants you new skills that weren't in the original game. The match-three elements are also used for tasks ranging from picking locks to opening doors. It does feel a little lazy, but it's put together with so much charm and zest that you'll still find yourself constantly returning to it.

>> Score **80%**

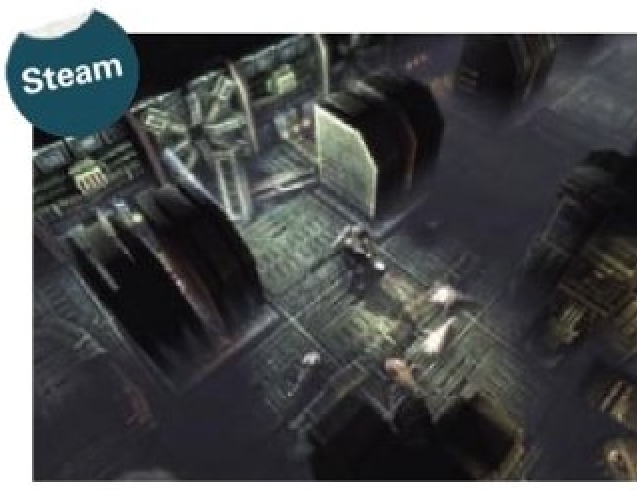


Dive: The Medes Island Secret

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Remember *Scuba Dive*** on the ZX Spectrum? Well this is the closest thing you're ever going to get to it on a current console. Taking control of a lone diver, you must explore the beautiful-looking levels in search of treasure, while avoiding some very dangerous denizens. Find the treasure and you can move on to the next stage and upgrade your equipment to explore further. It does get rather repetitive, but it's great fun while it lasts.

>> Score **70%**



Alien Breed: Impact

» **SYSTEM:** PC
» **PRICE:** £12.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Team17 goes** back to the drawing board and expands on *Alien Breed: Evolution*, last year's Xbox Live Arcade reboot of its classic Amiga series, for the PC and PS3 with this edition. Additions include an all-new prologue level, a better variety of aliens and, most importantly, the ability to upgrade weapons and items. The end result is a highly enjoyable little shooter, which, while good fun, especially when played with a friend, still isn't quite up to the standards of old but is certainly worth a look.

>> Score **77%**



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **The lack of** multiplayer drastically hurts it and the controls take a little while to master, but this remains a great little iPhone app. A huge amount of gameplay has been crammed into *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, and while licence issues mean that certain bands and the previously unlockable Spider-Man character are nowhere to be seen, you still have the best *Tony Hawk* skateboarding game of all time in the palm of your hand.

>> Score **81%**



Risk

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **Electronic Arts has** ported the classic strategy board game to the iPhone and it's a surprisingly accurate port that will likely please hardcore fans of the original, despite its notable flaws. Presentation is extremely solid, the visuals are as good as you can expect for the type of game it is, and the controls themselves are nice and responsive. Sadly for *Risk*, questionable AI, the lack of online multiplayer and the presence of better, albeit unofficial, versions means that this version is too little too late.

>> Score **64%**



Limbo

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Despite its relatively** high price point and total playtime of well under five hours, *Limbo* remains an astonishingly good game. Similar in style to *Braid* due to its indie sensibilities and clever mix of platforming and puzzle-solving, *Limbo* sees you playing a small boy in search of his sister. What follows are fiendish puzzles, truly gorgeous visuals and some of the goriest – and funniest, it must be said – videogame deaths we've seen for some time. An utterly compelling experience.

>> Score **88%**



Shining Force

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Sega's superb strategy** RPG hits the iPhone, and it's a resoundingly good port of the excellent Mega Drive original. While the game itself feels rather quaint and the on-screen controls aren't ideal, it works brilliantly thanks to an entertaining story, great combat mechanics and genuinely engaging characters. Emulation is also far better than previous iPhone offerings from Sega. *Shining Force* may have been released countless times in the past, but this remains an essential purchase for SRPG fans.

>> Score **92%**

>> SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE WORLD

XBLA



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Scott Pilgrim vs The World

>> The visuals were created by Paul Robertson, known for the internet movie *Pirate Baby's Cabana Battle Street Fighter 2006*.

>> The game's excellent chiptune soundtrack was written by punk band Anamanaguchi.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

RIVER CITY RANSOM (NES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

CASTLE CRASHERS (360)



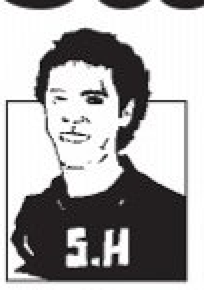
» [XBLA] There are plenty of Nintendo references in the game. Remind you of a colourful *Mario Kart* track much?



» [XBLA] Scott faces Ramona's first evil ex. Looks like he's done pretty well for himself, scoring triplets.

LOVE HURTS

Scott Pilgrim vs The World



Taking inspiration from the classic brawlers of yesteryear, the videogame adaptation of the *Scott Pilgrim* graphic novels and movie plays like a mixture of the cartoon fisticuffs of *The Simpsons* arcade game and the RPG-lite elements of the classic NES brawler *River City Ransom*.

From the *Super Mario World*-style game map, to a vegan spin on the 'Winners Don't Use Drugs' coin-op startup message, the game is littered with retro gaming references, and recognising them is certainly where a big part of the game's charm is found. But we're pleased to report that a solid and entertaining side-scrolling fighter lies suffocated beneath the sheer weight of all this fan service.

Ubisoft Montreal has baked the story into a side-scrolling beat-'em-up, and so players, choosing between Scott or one of his three pals, must battle through seven stages until they reach one of Scott's girlfriend's psychotic ex-boyfriends, who serve as the game's bosses.

With each character given their own unique repertoire, and new moves continually unlocked during the game, it has a surprisingly deep combat system. Further complementing this sense of variety is a seemingly endless array of random weapons, and players can also spend coins dropped by defeated enemies in RPG-style item shops to buy upgrades. And in true RPG fashion, players keep their powered-up state following a Game Over to make the next playthrough slightly easier – a good thing too, as most players will find the game pretty challenging.

But like many side-scrolling fighters, *Scott Pilgrim* suffers in its pacing and sense of repetition. Stages can sometimes feel like they drag, and this is due to basic level design concealed by pretty graphics, an often-overwhelming phalanx of enemies to battle, and its grinding nature. Also, while the game really comes into its own when played with friends, the lack of a drop-in/drop-out multiplayer option and online co-op also feels like a big oversight – especially when you consider that the game is trying so hard to replicate the arcade brawlers of old.

That said, these are just small gripes in what is still an entertaining and wonderfully presented love letter to our favourite pastime. This is as faithful a *Scott Pilgrim* game as most fans could have hoped for.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» Originating as a series of six graphic novels by Bryan Lee O'Malley, *Scott Pilgrim* follows the tale of Scott: a high school student, avid videogamer and bass guitarist, who must win the heart of a girl by fighting her seven evil ex-boyfriends. Loaded with videogame and pop culture references, the story has recently been adapted into a movie, directed by Edgar Wright.

OPINION



I'm in two minds about this new release. While it's amazingly retro, both in its styling and its nods to classic retro games, it just feels a little too unbalanced. The levels are far too long and as a result the adventure begins to get monotonous rather quickly.

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

Despite its inherent flaws and lack of online multiplayer, *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* is an enjoyable and beautiful game that captures perfectly the essence of Nineties arcade brawlers, and is sure to be enjoyed immensely by fans of the *Scott Pilgrim* graphic novels and classic games.

>> Scores

Presentation	**89%**
Graphics	**89%**
Sound	**90%**
Playability	**79%**
Addictivity	**75%**
Overall	**76%**


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HOMEBREW

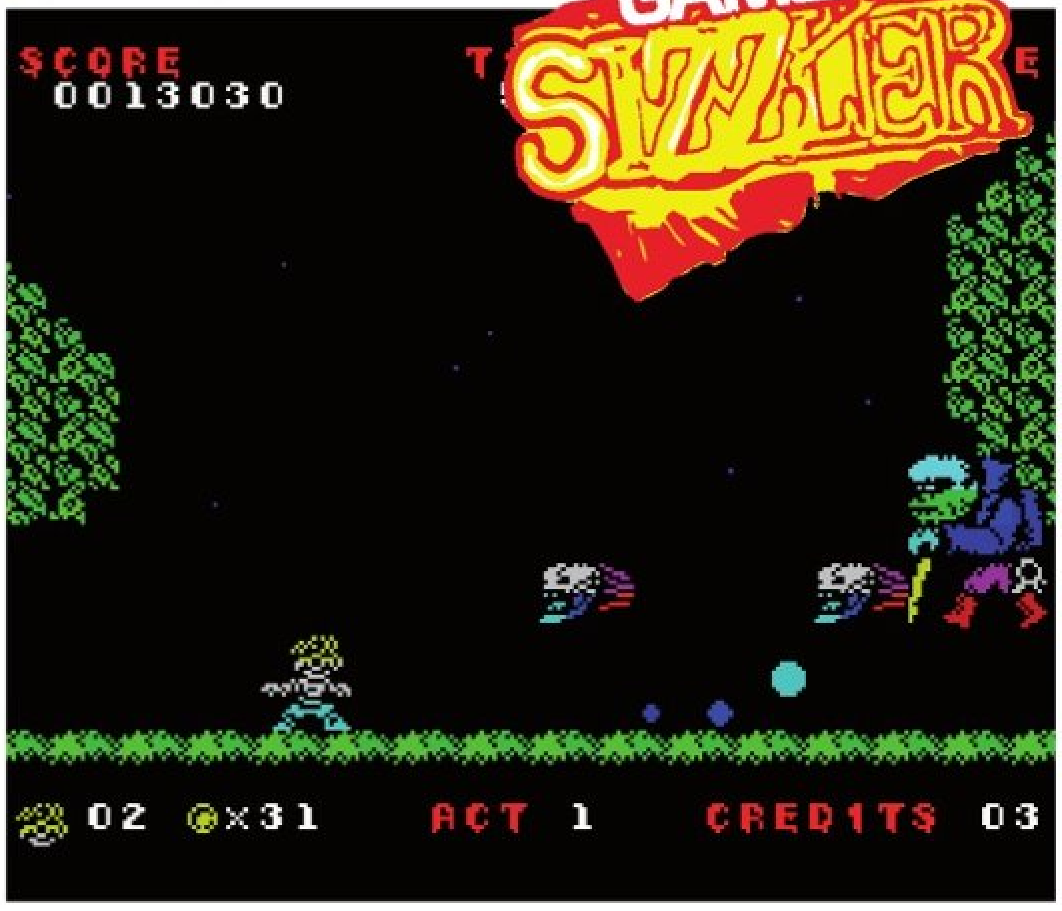
>> The scene's latest news and reviews



Many of you will turn the page and wonder why there are two photos on the Homebrew Heroes page but only one interviewee. Both photos arrived together last month, but the file names didn't say which was which and, despite knowing what Sean Gee looks like, I still managed to mix the files up when I sent them off. Therefore, I owe both Sean and Jarrod Bentley an apology and a pint



» [MSX] I think it's this way.



» [Spectrum] A dodgy old man in the woods… uh-oh!

retro GAMER SIZZLER

INVASION OF THE ZOMBIE MONSTERS

CARRIED AWAY LIKE A MOONLIGHT SHADOW



» **FORMAT:** MSX AND SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** RELEVO GAMES
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/ZOMBIE-MONSTERS
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK

Geeks never get any luck, do they? Poor Ned had just scored a major victory at the science fair with the aid of the lovely Linda and they were celebrating while parked in a quiet, romantic spot when it suddenly became a lot less quiet or indeed romantic: a huge and shadowy creature blasts the car with lightning and, pausing only to explain its plan to take over the world, absconds with Ned's girlfriend! Now the dead are rising to terrorise the living, but all isn't lost. Somehow the moonlight has energised Ned, and woe betide anybody or thing that gets between him and Linda.

The important details of the story are introduced when the game starts up on either machine through a series of captioned images and, after the functional titles page, the map of the game world appears with a spot of exposition for the current stage. As the game proper begins, it becomes obvious that *Ghosts 'N Goblins* must have been a major source of inspiration for developer Relevo Games. Ned may not sport a suit of armour to protect him, but his moonlight-driven superpowers can be increased by collecting items dropped by some of the enemies as they disappear in a ball of flame. Timing is everything when grabbing these power-ups because, along with smart bombs and extra time bonuses, collecting the wrong item will power Ned down.

The action is simple enough but couldn't exactly be described as easy. In true *Ghosts 'N Goblins* tradition, Ned battles his way through from the left-hand side of each level to the right, destroying assailants along the way before confronting a larger guardian. Enemies appear at set points in the map and can therefore be memorised, which is advised really since there are a couple of points in even the first level where the game plonks something nasty where the player is about to be, so learning to 'fake' the enemies by turning around mid leap is an incredibly useful skill.

Although everything moves in slightly jarring character-sized steps, the background and foreground graphics of both versions are colourful and detailed, even extending to little touches such as Ned's comically oversized glasses or his cartoon-like startled reaction whenever an end-of-level boss materialises. There are a reasonable number of variations among the undead too, with the regular zombie horde being augmented by skeletal hands that burst from the ground, bullet-spitting plants, and what appear to be airborne severed heads.

Invasion Of The Zombie Monsters is, apart from being long-winded to type repeatedly, a slickly produced platform game with a good amount of detail, decent presentation and a steep but not off-putting difficulty curve. The overall score after this review is for the MSX edition, since it just scrapes through to be the superior version due to a tiny bit more colour splashed about the place and the addition of just a smidgeon of parallax scrolling for good measure, although the Spectrum was only a couple of per cent behind.

90%



» [Spectrum] Have you lost weight?



» [MSX] Down the high street and left at the lights.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

SIR ABADOL

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ABADOL » **PRICE:** FREE

A rather nasty fall has seen Sir Abadol, an 11th Century knight out for a quick crusade or two, knocked unconscious and separated from his sword. Investigating further, he's pointed towards some eerie-looking waste ground scattered with bright red flowers to collect, as well as creatures of the night to avoid, corrosive lakes to negotiate, and keys that unlock portcullises. Grabbing 25 flowers sees the brave knight reunited with his oversized letter opener.

After just the first couple of screens, the game becomes difficult, even with the energy counter, in part because the precise collision detection that has served the developers well before just proves to be too precise – dropping through smaller gaps can take five or six attempts to line up, and poor Sir Abadol can register a collision with an enemy despite having a few pixels clearance. The frustration level is simply too high.

64%



» [Spectrum] A rose by any other name…

PIPE PANIC

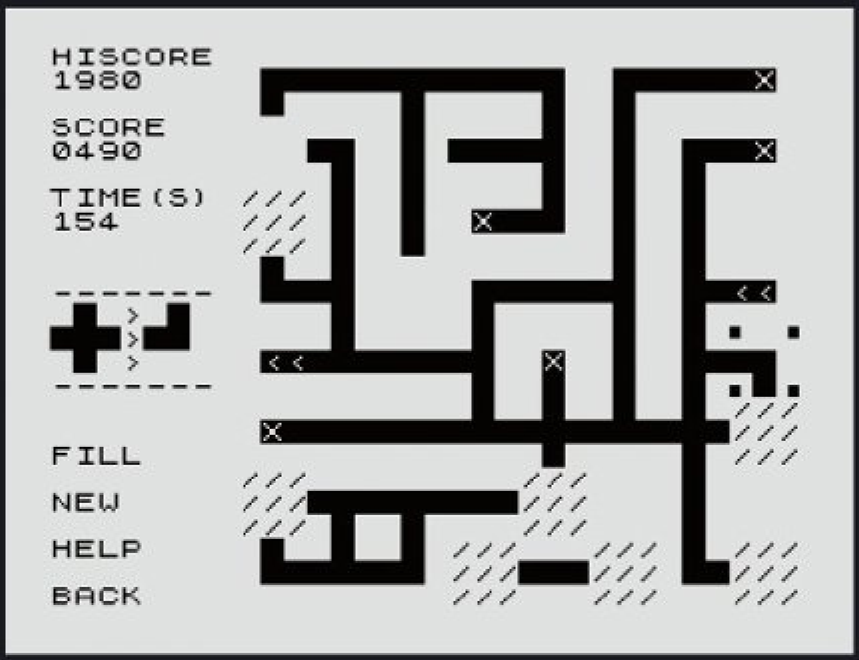
» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED ZX81 » **DEVELOPER:** THUNOR
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PIPE-PANIC » **PRICE:** FREE

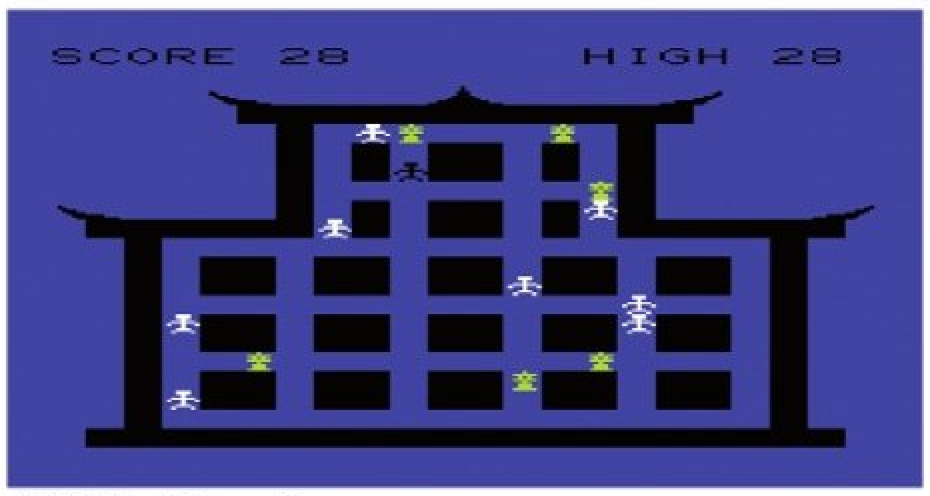
The ZX81 hasn't been blessed with a multitude of *Pipe Mania* variants, so it was a pleasant surprise when the author of *Pipe Panic* announced it on the **Retro Gamer** forums. The player is charged with laying pipes between two points and making sure the network they build is watertight, although the primary objective here is to score as highly as possible; points are awarded for more convoluted layouts and releasing fluid into the system before the timer expires, but players will lose score if they replace already installed parts or leave pieces laying around without connecting them.

Everything has been tidily presented, the menus are clear, and the character graphics during play were selected with care – in fact, the only thing *Pipe Panic* really lacks is longevity. Had there been levels that became more cluttered as the player progressed through the game it would have been more engrossing, but as it stands, players will be competing for score, so this is one for getting a couple of friends over to play.

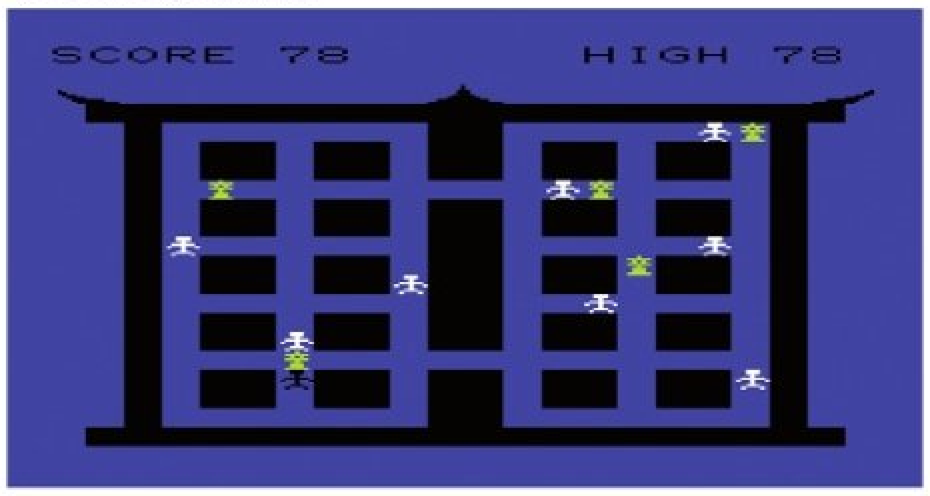
77%

» [ZX81] Charge the system!





» [VIC-20] You light up my life.



NIGHT OF THE NINJA

» **FORMAT:** UNEXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** JEFF DANIELS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/NOT-NINJA » **PRICE:** FREE

Everybody loves a ninja, especially one whose mission it is to steal a selection of enchanted goodies from the fortress of an evil overlord. This particular undercover warrior is hunting for eight mystical lanterns, each magically labelled with a letter that must be collected alphabetically. They're defended by white ninjas patrolling the hallways, unable to see the stealthy sneak thief but listening out for his footsteps.

The ninja guards are fleet of foot and the overall speed of play in *Night Of The Ninja* requires the reflexes of an actual ninja, and the random element of each level, while meaning that the four stages don't become too predictable on repeated plays, likes placing lamps and enemies just where they'll be hardest to deal with. But despite being tough, *Night Of The Ninja* is still amusing – even more so if you sneakily dial the speed down with a fully featured emulator – and offers an easier mode for the faint of heart where only one specific lamp needs locating.

70%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Spectrum] A Mojon Twins game… surprise!

>> Perilous Situation

Those pesky Mojon Twins – just as we review one game, they release another! *Cheril Perils* is more platforming action, but the heroine has been given the ability to stomp on the heads of her enemies – which is convenient, since Cheril is trapped in a monster-infested village and must squish 60 nasties to escape. More information over at **kikstart.eu/cheril**, but be warned: there's something of an 'adult' theme!



» [Oric] Save the faeries.

>> Where's The Streetwise Hercules?

Oric maven Jonathan 'Twilighte' Bristow has been quiet the last couple of years, but we've just found out why: he's been working at pushing Rafaele Cecco's *Stormlord* into the Oric! The scrolling has been dropped, but the graphics are very colourful and it doesn't seem to have suffered from that change. Have a look at **stormlord.defence-force.org**.



» [C64] Intruder alert, intruder alert!

>> More Coins Detected In Pocket

Finally, a little update notice: fans of Martin Piper's *Bezerk Redux* for the C64 will probably want to know about the recently released version 1.1. Nothing major has changed in the gameplay, but a couple of bugs in the original release have been splattered. Get the revision from over at **kikstart.eu/berzerk-redux** and fight like a robot.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> One Switch Wonder

Last issue we mentioned Indie Kombat, a site set up so that Oddbob and Farbs could settle their differences in a mature and sensible way: by badmouthing each other and releasing games. Well, the first couple of titles are complete, and Oddbob's game *Fish Fish Bang Bang* is out! Interestingly, two new challengers have stepped up, so this is turning into a geeky version of *Fight Club*, except they do talk about it. At length. **kikstart.eu/fight** has more information.



>> I Believe In Magick

And over at Retro Remakes, Spraydough has been toiling away at a remake of *Heavy On The Magick*. At the moment he doesn't have any graphics so everything is being rendered in glorious 16-colour ASCII characters, but significant progress is apparently being made along with interesting noises about a new point-and-click user interface and a potential Nintendo DS conversion. That ongoing conversation can be read at **kikstart.eu/magick**

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***The Pinball Adventure.***

INSPIRED BY TITLES such as *Devil Crash*, this is a pinball game where the bonuses are demonic beings that must be destroyed by the ball to score points and complete challenges. Romping through all four tables isn't too challenging, but it's fun and will kill a spare half hour. **kikstart.eu/pinball-adv**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



Remake of the Month



HYDORAH

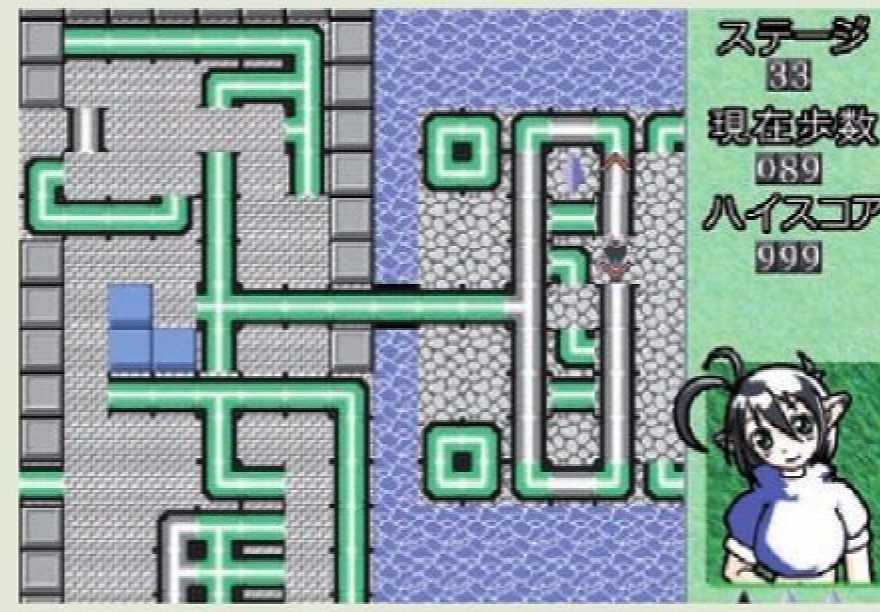
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/HYDORAH



It's not often that single-person space fighters are used to combat evil gods, but when Hydorah springs up from nowhere and all but decimates the defence forces of the human race, that's all they're left with to fight him. At least the fighter in question can offer a bit of firepower, which can be augmented by power-up pods left in the debris of smaller enemies, and bigger and better weapons dropped by the larger bosses.

The inspirations cited for *Hydorah* range from coin-op classics like *Gradius* or *R-Type* to *Armalyte* and *Enforcer* for the C64, and the difficulty has been geared to reflect that heritage. In other words, it'll take a serious stab at stomping on the player's ship but it won't cheat to get that kill. That does mean that the player needs to keep an eye on literally everything, however, because the otherwise innocuous rustling plants fire deadly spears, and statues can topple over without warning.

And while its muses commonly had around eight stages, *Hydorah* boasts 16, which are, in turn, divided into 27 sub-levels and a whopping 30 bosses. The route through this carnage branches occasionally, so players can choose to avoid levels that they find particularly nasty or return to base to save the current mission; both very useful considering the difficulty and scale of a challenge that almost every fan of blasters should enjoy immensely.



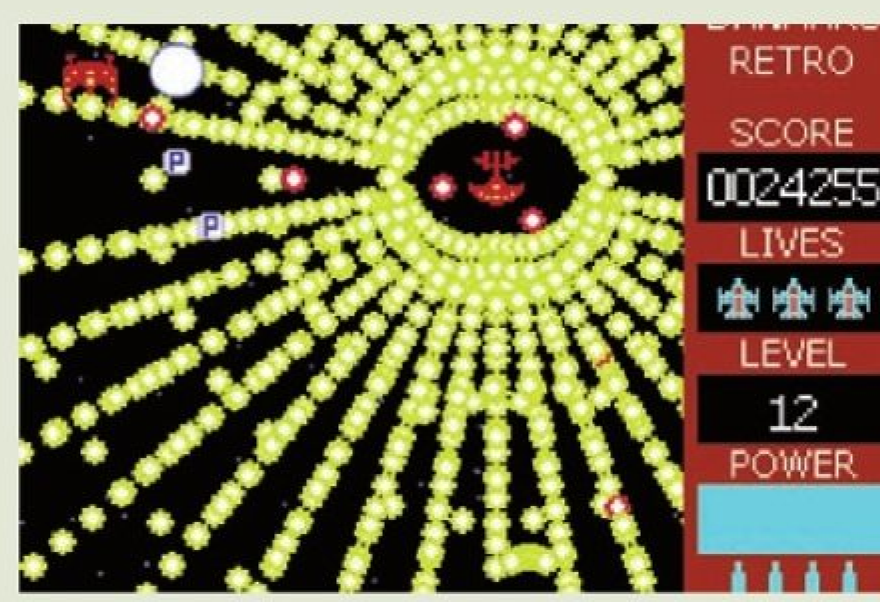
CONNECTION ROAD

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/C-ROAD



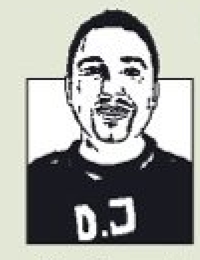
At first glance, *Connection Road* resembles the warehouseman's nightmare that is *Sokoban*, but the rules have been relaxed a little, so rather than having to manoeuvre crates to specific locations, the plumber's objective is to grab three blue gems on each level. In order to do this she must push blocks out of her way and shunt the moveable segments of pipe to circumnavigate obstacles.

There isn't a timer to worry about so each level can be undertaken at a leisurely pace, and that's for the best considering how devious some of the later stages are – after the puzzles are solved, players can go through again, trying to complete them in the lowest possible number of moves.



DANMAKU RETRO

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DANMAKU-RETRO



***Danmaku Retro* is** a bullet hell shoot-'em-up but, as we've noted previously, readers shouldn't let the almost ridiculous number of projectiles in the screenshots put them off. The ship has a small collision area so it can dodge through tiny gaps, the smart bomb can clear the screen in emergencies, and the power bar that governs the player's firepower doubles as the shield gauge, so a couple of hits can be taken before a life is lost.

The overall theme here is 'bullet hell game as it would appear on the ColecoVision' – the graphics are appropriately chunky and brightly coloured, the sound is similarly uncomplicated and, despite the relatively sedate pace, the action does still manage to get the adrenaline pumping.



» Sean Gee

» Jarrod Bentley

HOMEBREW HEROES

AFTER SPEAKING TO HIS BOG BROTHER-IN-ARMS LAST ISSUE, WE'VE SINCE MANAGED TO CORNER **SEAN 'CODENAMEV' GEE** FOR A BIT OF A CHAT ABOUT TROOPER, GHOSTS AND WHAT MAKES PROGRAMMING FUN

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What was it that originally got you into programming games and how did you end up on the Spectrum?

Sean Gee: I started off with a ZX81, and although there were a lot of great games, considering how limited the machine was, I spent a lot of my time learning BASIC by reading the rather excellent Sinclair manual or dissecting the wealth of type-ins that were available. Then my cousins started bragging about their new ZX Spectrum and I spent a lot of my weekends at their house getting hooked on *Manic Miner* and *Chuckie Egg*. As soon as I could I upgraded and got hold of a 16K Spectrum with a 32K RAM pack and a bit of Blu-Tack to stop the wobble. I did try a little bit of programming but, believe it or not, it was at this point I was bitten by the C64 demo scene.

RG: What made you return to these machines now?

SG: It's Jarrod Bentley's fault. I've been writing games for various platforms over the years purely because I like to know how a machine ticks. I had started using XNA and was getting some promising results and Jed was going to do some graphics for me, but I'm still waiting for them! Anyway, Jed started to show me some of his ideas for a new platform game using the Arcade Game Designer, and having done a bit of Z80 assembly a long time ago I borrowed some of his books to refresh my memory. I started by writing some simple games – one was a *City Bomber* clone – and as I learned more about the machine the games became more complex until I was ready to do *Ghost Castle*.

RG: And how do those eras compare?

SG: Well back then you may have had a lot of friends that played games, but coding was mostly a solo experience. Today, at least with access to the internet, there is a whole host of resources at your fingertips. And if you do get stuck there are a lot of people willing to help and give advice – a scarce resource in the Eighties. The tools are a lot more user-friendly, and by using an emulator instead of real hardware it's a lot easier to debug. Back then if a game crashed you had to trawl your source code. By using something like TommyGun with Spin or SpecEmu you can run the debugger and actually see what effect the code has had, to give you a better idea what has gone wrong. And storage could be dodgy. Tapes were the cheapest option but you were always afraid of the old 'R Tape Loading Error'. I don't want to even talk about micro drives, and not everyone could afford something like an Opus Discovery.

RG: Which is the game you're most proud of and why?

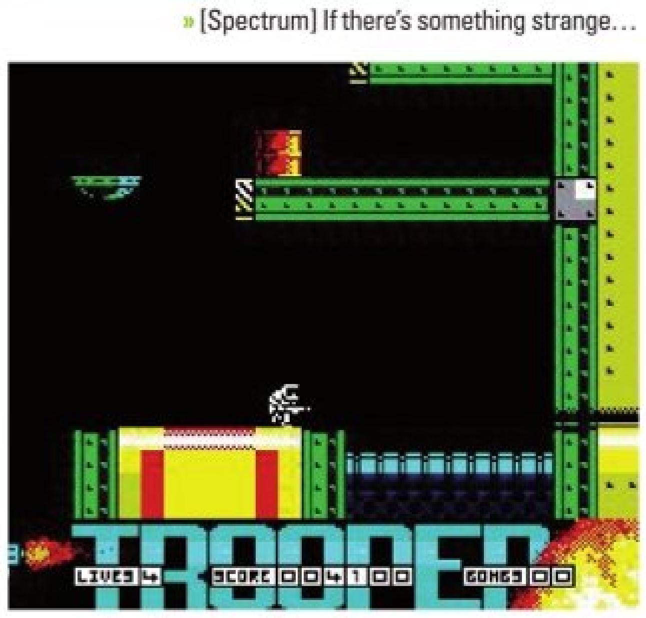
SG: I have to say *Ghost Castle* for a good couple of reasons. Firstly because it's the first complete game I've written for the Spectrum. Although I've written a few games during the learning curve, most of them have been more of a tech demo as I've got to grips with Z80 assembly. Secondly, the game was inspired by my kids, Conner and Reece. When I was first getting to grips with XNA I had written a simple routine to move a sprite around the screen. The kids were watching and said, 'Wouldn't it be great if it could pick up a key and open a door,' and that got me thinking. We sat down and talked about some other ideas: sliding on ice, pushing blocks, and throwing switches. When I was looking for an idea for my first full Z80 game, it dawned on me that this style would work well on the Spectrum. When Jed came up with the ghost as the main sprite, the name changed to *Ghost House*. As the backgrounds took on a more medieval slant then it eventually became *Ghost Castle*.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?

SG: You need to get to grips with the hardware and any quirks it may have. Some can be used to your advantage, others you may have to really work around. Join a forum dedicated to your machine of choice where there will be a whole host of people who will have a lot of experience, and in most cases are willing to share their knowledge, and that's half the battle won right there. Most importantly, don't be afraid of low-level languages like Z80 assembly; it can lead to a greater understanding of higher-level languages such as C++ and C#.



» [Spectrum] If there's something strange…



» [Spectrum] Another preview of *Trooper: ODST*.



» [Spectrum] *Trooper: Point 5*, reviewed last issue.

HIGH FIVE

The Indie Games that Sean can't live without

1 Jet Set Willy 16K (Spectrum) How Jonathan fitted it in that small amount of memory is voodoo.

2 Gloop Troops (Spectrum) Great use of colour and the cute sprites are like old-school arcade hits.

3 SplATTR (Spectrum) Great idea using attributes instead of sprites. Just brilliant.

4 W*H*B (Spectrum) It's just sooo addictive.

5 Sokoban (Spectrum) Great adaptation of the original by Compiler Software. It gave me the inspiration for *Ghost Castle*.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, we've been building our GBA collections.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

This month Darran's been building his GBA collection



■ After deciding to buy a Game Boy Micro, Darran picked up this bundle. Sadly, the power supply wasn't included and the copy of *Mario Kart* was a fake. Total price: £32.



■ The £150 price tag was steep, but the rarity and brilliance of this bundle was hard to pass up. Add in the fact that everything was in mint condition and this ended up being a bargain.



■ If you're interested in dabbling in the GBA market then there are plenty of bargains on eBay. This pack is yours for £20. More searching would undoubtedly yield better results.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)

COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)





FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)

MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
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DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

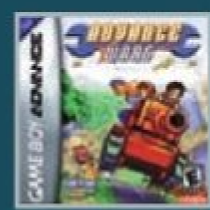
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest that have caught our eyes. This month we hunted down some of the GBA's best and brightest



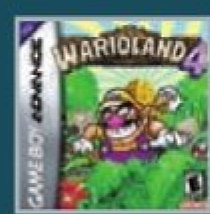
METAL SLUG ADVANCE
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£7**



ADVANCE WARS
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£4.29**



CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£35**
Ended at **£16.99**



WARIO LAND 4
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£9.99**



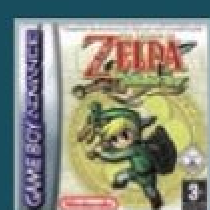
POKÉMON PINBALL
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£12.57**



YOSHI'S ISLAND: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 3
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£24**
Ended at **£12.57**



GOLDEN SUN
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£23**
Ended at **£8.79**



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP
System: **GBA**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£11.78**

NEC	
PC-6601	£10+ ($18+)
PC-8801	£20 ($37)
PC-9801	£35 ($65)
PC-FX	£50 ($92)
PC-ENGINE	£55 ($101)
PC-ENGINE GT	£70+ ($129+)
TURBOGRAFX-16	£30 ($55)
TURBO EXPRESS	£50 ($92)
SUPERGRAFX	£80 ($147)
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	£50+ ($92+)
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	£120 ($221)
DUO-R	£80 ($147)

NINTENDO



NINTENDO	
FAMICOM	£60 ($111)
FAMICOM AV	£40 ($74)
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	£70 ($129)
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	£100 ($184)
GAME & WATCH	£1+ ($2+)
GAME BOY B/W	£5 ($9)
GAME BOY POCKET	£8 ($15)
GAME BOY COLOR	£12 ($22)
GAME BOY ADVANCE	£25 ($46)
N64	£10 ($18)
N64 DD	£150+ ($276+)
NES (TOASTER)	£15 ($28)
NES (DOG BONE)	£50 ($92)
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	£20 ($37)
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	£50+ ($92+)
VIRTUAL BOY	£80 ($147)

PHILIPS	
CD-I	£20+ ($37+)
CD-I 450/500	£30 ($55)
VIDEOPAC G7000	£10 ($18)
VIDEOPAC G7400	£20 ($37)

SEGA



SEGA	
32X	£35 ($65)
DREAMCAST	£25 ($46)
GAME GEAR	£15 ($28)
SG-1000	£50-£150 ($80-$260)
SC-3000	£50 ($92)
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	£10 ($18)
AMSTRAD MEGA PC	£10 ($18)
TERADRIVE	£100 ($184)
MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS	£25 ($46)
GENESIS 3	£35 ($65)
NOMAD	£100 ($184)
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	£100+ ($184+)
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	£50+ ($92+)
PICO	£20 ($37)
SATURN	£30 ($55)

SINCLAIR	
ZX80	£200 ($368)
ZX81	£70 ($129)
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	£10 ($18)
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	£40 ($74)
ZX SPECTRUM+	£35 ($65)
ZX SPECTRUM +2	£35 ($65)
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40 ($74)

SNK	
NEO-GEO AES	£150+ ($276+)
NEO-GEO MVS	£70 ($129)
NEO-GEO CD	£100 ($184)
NEO-GEO CDZ	£80+ ($147+)
NEO-GEO POCKET	£20 ($37)
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	£35 ($65)

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR, NEIL FENTON, HAS BEEN ON A MISSION TO COLLECT EVERY PAL XBOX GAME



» My name is Neil Fenton and I am 41 years old. I live in Elm Park, Essex, and work for BMW as a senior parts sales advisor.



» I own every PAL Xbox game that many others and I know of, although that is not to say it is a complete collection!



» A very rare Eurogamer signature edition of *Alien Hominid*. I've never seen another.



» A snippet of the many Xbox accessories that I own, as well as three boxed complete consoles.



» If you're a fellow Xbox enthusiast then please **contact me** at fenton.12@ntlworld.com. I'd love to hear **from you.**



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**





» If we could create a *Super Smash Bros.* game, it wouldn't look too dissimilar to the left image – or even the right one, for that matter.

STAR LETTER

SCARY INSIGHT INTO THE MIND OF A VIC-20 OWNER



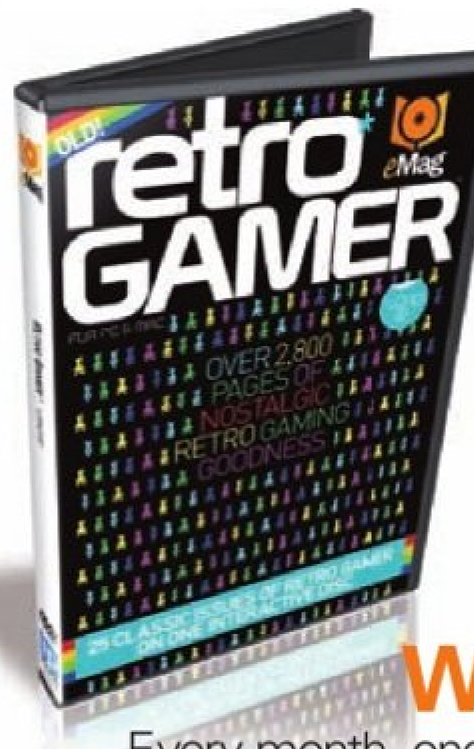
» [VIC-20] *Samantha Fox Strip Poker* – the only version of strip poker we've ever played in which glasses count as a turn!

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
I might be the only one, but I do not believe that the Commodore VIC-20 was a useless stepchild to the Commodore 64. Indeed, I even managed once to do a conversion of the old C64 classic *Sam Fox Strip Poker* for the VIC – although the end result came out quite pixellated due to the VIC-20 not being in the same league of the C64 when it came to graphic resolution (see picture attached). But I am still proud of my conversion – I think I did quite well given the 3.5k ceiling limit I was given and the fact that I even managed to program a card game into it as well (actually I didn't, we just brought a real pack of cards to the screen and used it there while the pictures alternated every few minutes).

Anyway, cheers. I'm sure you'll agree nothing can hold back the coming revolution of the mighty VIC-20; it is bound to happen and I for one sit tight in tense anticipation and childlike wonderment of this upcoming event.

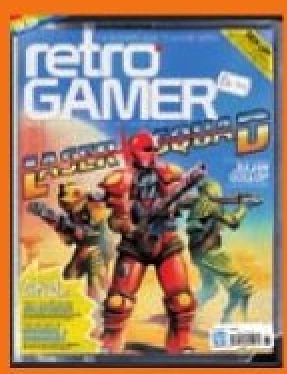
Best wishes, Rob

You certainly put forward a convincing, if slighting disturbing, case for the imminent revolution of the mighty VIC-20 you mention in your letter, Rob. Just so we're all clear: using the limited tech of the VIC-20 you somehow managed to create a conversion of *Sam Fox Strip Poker* for the machine that wasn't really a conversion at all, or even a card game, but was in fact a series of pixelated images of the female form for you and your pals to gawp at while you all played actual cards. That's amazing. If we promise to make you Star Letter will you vow never to write in again?



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

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>> YOUTUBE UPDATE

AFTER RECENTLY GETTING stung by some dodgy pirate GBA cartridges, Darran has now made it his duty to wipe out as many as possible. You can see the crazy results online. He's also in the process of documenting every single Lynx release, so head on over for all the latest videos. **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz**

MINI-GAME

Greetings **RG,**
I've just put together a retro-gaming Spot The Difference and I thought you might like to publish it in your magazine so your readers can try it out. Hope you like it and keep up the great work – the magazine's great.
Jose Luis Martinez, Argentina

Thanks Jose, we do like it and would love to publish it in the magazine. So readers, take a look at the two images here and see if you can spot the 37 differences. We'll be printing the solution next month.

PAPERMAN

All hail **Retro Gamer!**
I've been reading your magazine since issue 16 after noticing it in the newsagents; I think the label 'OLD!' caught my eye! I came to this hobby from MAME, having built a cocktail cab. When I moved to another city, though, I had to leave it behind, which left quite a void. Having never owned a console, I was mostly interested in the articles about arcade-related history. Over time, though, you guys have actually changed my life.

How so? Well, one day I bought an N64 after checking out an emulator. This was my first console, and your excellent write-up on it surely swayed me. This was during annual leave. I was buying carts from eBay when I figured I might as well try the old-fashioned newspaper classifieds. That Saturday's paper yielded no N64 goodness, but in looking through the rest of the paper, I came across an article in the Careers section. It was titled 'A day in the life of a postal delivery officer'. I figured that could be something I could have a crack at (we use motorbikes in Australia to deliver suburban mail). I put in a resume online, and a week later I got a call! When I went back to work, I gave them a month's notice and I've been a 'postie' for nearly three years now! This wouldn't have happened if not for my Nintendo 64, and thus your magazine.

I now have the N64, SMS, Mega Drive II, Wii and a brand new Jaguar. Also a Lynx, NGP and GP2X. And now I'm hacking custom controllers that I sell. I'm not making a fortune, but it's nice to make something that people appreciate. All this because of your magazine! Oh, and your John Romero 'takeover'? Brilliant!
Cheers, Danny Gadza. Brisbane

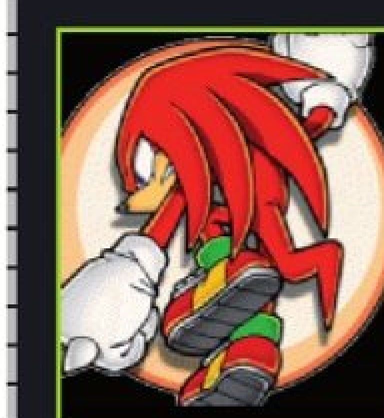
Hi Danny, Cheers for the kind words about the magazine. While we were sad to hear that you were forced to leave your cocktail arcade machine when you upped sticks, we are glad to hear that through the combined efforts of our magazine, your N64 and some random article you discovered perchance about postmen we have been able to help change your life for the better. As if that wasn't enough, you'll also be glad to hear that we have more N64 features in the pipeline, so watch this space – the world of Danny just gets better and better. Be sure to play the lotto.

THE SHENMUE SUPPORTERS ASSOCIATION SPEAKS

Just read your article on the *Shenmue* series; a really great read and great insight into one >>

> " Nothing can hold back the revolution of the mighty VIC-20; it is bound to happen "

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Liam Hughes
Joined:	14 July 2010
Location:	Wrexham
Occupation:	Not given
Website:	Not given
Fave Games Systems:	Sega Saturn



>> [N64] Through the power of emulation we were finally able to track down the article that helped change Danny Gadza's life.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 250,020



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME:
THUNDER CROSS
Why I picked it: Because it reminds me of *Salamander*, which I'm desperate to play on Microsoft's Game Room.
Handy tip: Careful use of your options is always the key to victory, but watch out for stray bullets.



High Score: 14,643



STUART

CHOSEN GAME:
3D DEATHCHASE
Why I picked it: You never need an excuse to play *Deathchase*.
Handy tip: Negotiating your way through the trees is chief. With no time limit to worry about, patience is a virtue when shooting down enemy cycles.



High Score: 2,850



DAVID

CHOSEN GAME:
FROGGER
Why I picked it: To see if it's still as bad as I remember. It is.
Handy tip: Drink lots of Red Bull to stop yourself falling asleep, maybe? Sorry, *Frogger*'s not exactly my favourite.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What is your favourite Shinobi game?

the_hawk
Tempted as I am to go for *Shadow Dancer* because of the best use of a doggie in a game ever, I'm gonna plump for *Revenge*. The second Mega Drive game I ever owned, the music, bosses and the disco level bring back so many good memories.

jdanddiet
The Revenge Of Shinobi. I first played it as one of the titles on *Mega Games 2* which came with my first Mega Drive. Great game, never got past Spidey though...

Sputryk
Only ever played arcade *Shinobi*, so I choose that. Great game only let down by the inability to 'continue' during the final level. How annoying that was the first time I got that far!

Greyfox
For me it would be the original classic *Shinobi*, while away on holidays in Pontins in North Wales back in 1988, I managed to pull a holiday romance from a female onlooker while playing this… so it has to be the original *Shinobi* for me.

merman
I'm going to head out to left field and nominate *Alex Kidd In Shinobi* World. I just love the cute little ninja outfit, and it was the last *Alex Kidd* game released to date.

Smurph
Shinobi 3 is an awesome game. Fast, fun, and a great improvement over *Revenge*, but it's a close second to the awesome *GG Shinobi*, with its Metroidvania-lite take on the normal *Shinobi* template.

lpmarks
Sadly I've never played a *Shinobi* game, so consequently do not have a favourite. As such I stand no chance of getting my name and quote in the next issue… Nuts. Is it too late to say arcade *Shinobi*?

Cafeman
Shinobi Legions, even though its gameplay isn't quite as good as the 16-bit games. It's very entertaining to me, and I like the various ways you can use Sho's sword to slice and even block shurikens.

thevulture
Revenge Of Shinobi on the Mega Drive. One of the first games I had for the machine and was (hell, still is) bloody marvellous. Uber playable, fantastic bosses, and remains the pinnacle of the series. The game never felt unfair – challenging in places, sure, but damn I loved it.

Thl
I'd say *Revenge Of Shinobi*. It's one of my favourite Mega Drive games, and was an improvement over its predecessor. It had a lot to offer including unique martial arts skills, incredible music and top-notch level design. Plus its boss battles were very odd as you encountered Spider-Man, Batman and Godzilla.

Skull Commander
A very tough question as there are so many great *Shinobi* games.

I really like the Master System version, which wasn't quite as frustrating as the arcade version. I also enjoy the Saturn one, but it's too cheesy to be the best, so I'm going to have to go with *Revenge Of Shinobi*. It had the best music in the series, and I spent hours trying to make that jump in the harbour level!

TwoHeadedBoy
Shinobi III for the dashing and the wall-jumping and the horse-riding and that big monster made out of organs and suchlike - plus, it was the first one I managed to finish. *Shinobi X* is amazingly good as well – that sword upgrade where he makes a massive ghost?

And *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* too, because the first boss is Mario!

Dunjohn
Revenge Of Shinobi was the only one I ever played. I couldn't pass it, thanks to that impossible jump on the moving train level, but I still loved it. Playing it again on the *Ultimate Mega Drive Collection* on Xbox 360, I discovered he had a double jump. How about that?

Gmintyfresh
You can't beat the original arcade version for me – it's still hugely playable even in the present day. It's also reassuringly familiar because the game spawned so many great arcade and console scrolling slash-'em-ups. It didn't create the genre it revolutionised it.

Dan Hero
The original arcade one, I can still finish it with a single credit and remember all the tricks such as the one that prevents the bazooka-wielding macho men from shooting and the one to face Mandara without killing the legion of spinning Buddhas!

Miketendo
Shinobi 3, by a landslide. Music is fantastic, one of the best scores on the Genesis. Second place is *Shinobi* for PlayStation 2 but holy difficulty, Batman!

JetSetWilly
Revenge was the first I ever played (thanks to the MCD), and loved it. But I also love *Shadow Dancer* as well (mainly for the use of the dog). I'd say *Shadow Dancer*… but only by a very slim margin.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

WORST BEAT-'EM-UPS

Megamixer *Tattoo Assassins*. Almost complete digitised one-on-one fighter with hilariously bad characters, crappy FMV intro and insane fatalities. One fatality has a tattoo of an eagle coming to life from a guy's chest, swooping upwards and taking a big green acidy crap on the loser.

pottyboy Can't believe no one has mentioned *Dangerous Streets*. Have played the floppy version via emulation, and all I can say is that it's [censored] of the highest order! And do you know what the worst thing about it was? It was bundled with the CD32! What the hell was Commodore thinking, bundling such [censored] with its system?

DPrinny *Virtua Fighter 2* on the Mega Drive! And *Fighters Megamix* on the Game.com – two ports of games that should never have happened.

GUILTY PLEASURES

Retrojc Every *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* game ever.

nakamura *Jet Ion GP*. It is terrible but I quite like it. Also have *Kaido Battle 3*/ *Tokyo Highways Battle* PSone/DC/PS2 in various versions.

Rayne Every single *Dynasty Warriors* game in the history of the universe.

Nokgod *The Smurf's Nightmare* GBC. I'm so sorry… it's a great little platformer, though. Honest.

felgekarp *Rumble Roses* on the PS2 – it plays a lot better than the version on the 360… which I also own.

Mire Mare *Rocky* on the GC. Not so much because the game is a guilty pleasure but I do like setting the game to Easy and making Ivan Drago suffer.

START OFF WELL BUT…

Roo *Super Paper Mario* is the first one that popped into my head. For the first two hours or so, it's the most amazing thing in the world, but the form seriously dips after the second round of levels.

mainvein Agree completely with *Dead Rising*. Never before have I looked forward to getting the game based on playing the demo and then been so peed off after playing for an hour.

SoupDragon *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The tanker section was good then things went less so. I still play it occasionally, though.

Sir Hilary Bray *Sonic CD*. First level is a great way to start the game; second zone is good; third (the water one) is decent as well. Then all the levels start to feel and look a bit samey. I know it's a weird thing to say, but there were not enough outside levels for me.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Hydro Thunder is the best?

Hydro Thunder



Hydro Thunder Hurricane



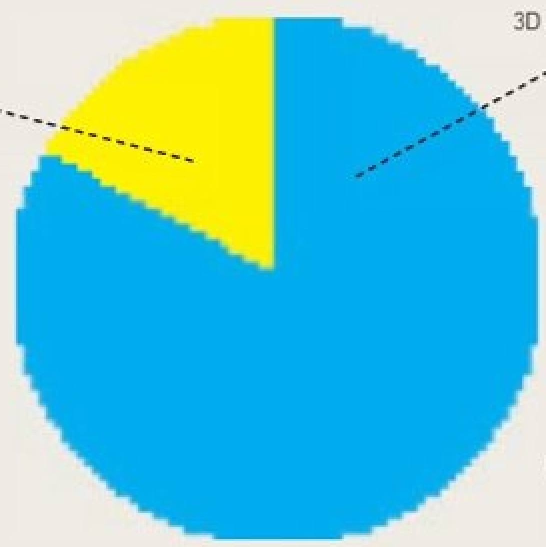
70% | 30%

Kai
The original *Hydro Thunder* for me. It looks better and is more fun to play!

Mire Mare
No brainer – *Hurricane*. The most fun you can have with boats and not get wet.

HOT TOPIC

Best Micromega Game



"It's got to be *Return Of The Jedi*… sorry, *Deathchase*"
– Antiriad2097

"*Codename MAT* is the only one I've really played off the list and was good enough"
– Ralph Milne's Left Foot

"I loved *Full Throttle* back in the day, but it's really not stood the test of time. However, *Deathchase* I played a couple of days ago and it's still fresh as a daisy"
– the_hawk



» **[DC] How we think the *Shenmue* saga will finish: Ryo and Lan Di discover they're brothers. The end.**

of if not my favourite game of all time. Having played the originals on PAL and imported Dreamcasts back in the day, I recently picked up a second-hand copy of the Xbox game that I'm currently playing on my 360. Thanks again for bringing this to the public's attention in the hope that we can stir enough interest to get *Shenmue 3* produced. It seems as if this might be the time, seeing as we are getting re-releases of old Dreamcast titles for Xbox Live. Can I ask why you decided to do an article about this game now? Do you know something we don't?

Great work!

Regards, Daniel

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I'm the owner and designer of Shenmue Dojo. I would like to express my gratitude for your efforts in divulging the *Shenmue* development line, along with some key facts about the series' realistic future. I was greatly impressed by your article, as it went beyond the typical development scenarios and more into the heart of the series' focal points. It was obviously done with much research, care and respect for the series and I would like to offer my thanks for the effort.

I recently re-created Shenmue Dojo from the ground up. Ironically, the new design went up a few days after the *Shenmue*-oriented **Retro Gamer** was released. Great timing and I hope you've had a chance to check out the new website for yourself. If you haven't yet, it'd be my honor to have you take a look and perhaps stop by.

One last thing, as I'm from New York, it is a bit hard to get my hands on an issue. I went to Barnes and Noble, however they said the magazine stopped being shipped in 2007 – is there any possible way you could send one from your headquarters and I'll of course cover all expenses and retail value? I would love to add it to my collection. Thank you again for your tremendous effort!

George Melita (Yama)
http://shenmuedojo.net

> "I gave them a month's notice and I've been a 'postie' for nearly three years now!"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Steve's Flight Woes

Poor Steve missed his friend's wedding this month, after an unprecedented amount of congestion on the usually quiet M25 caused him to miss his flight to Poland. It took him a remarkable five hours to make the normal two-hour journey from Bournemouth to Stansted Airport, and this was with a single toilet break, which Steve assured us took him his usual 16 minutes. Darran and Stuart actually found the whole story quite amusing, especially as Steve came very close to having wet eyes when he recounted the whole sorry, miserable and unfortunate tale of his disastrous weekend.

Cheers for the letters guys, and also to George and the rest of the team and community over at Shenmue Dojo for their assistance and help with the article. We actually got in touch with Cole, the freelancer who wrote the article, to pass on your messages directly, and here's what he had to say in response:

Hello,
Thanks for the kind words! Between the excitement generated by Ryo's inclusion in the recent *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* and the new buzz about the possibility of *Shenmue* being released on Xbox Live and PlayStation Network it seems like the series is now getting more attention than it has in years. I don't think we're alone in hoping all this buzz might just get someone at Sega thinking about paying the series a visit. I'm glad you enjoyed the article, and I'm glad I was able to share a little about not only the nuts and bolts of what went into the game, but a little bit of the magic that was *Shenmue* as well. As for the new-look Shenmue Dojo, George, it's looking fantastic. Keep up the good work!

Cole

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN
Magic The Gathering Online
I'm a huge fan of the card game, and I pretty much spent my entire holiday playing the digital version. It's a great strategy title, even if it is costing me a small fortune in cards. You should see how good my deck is, though…





STUART
Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair
It might be a grind in single-player, but offers such a great time with pals I struggle to see how *Castlevania* could've been turned into a better multiplayer experience – oh yeah, offline multiplayer.





DAVID
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light
Ever since the first game enabled me to show off the PSone under my TV, I've been a *Tomb Raider* fan. The series has had its ups and downs but this is Lara at her delicious best.

retro* GAMER

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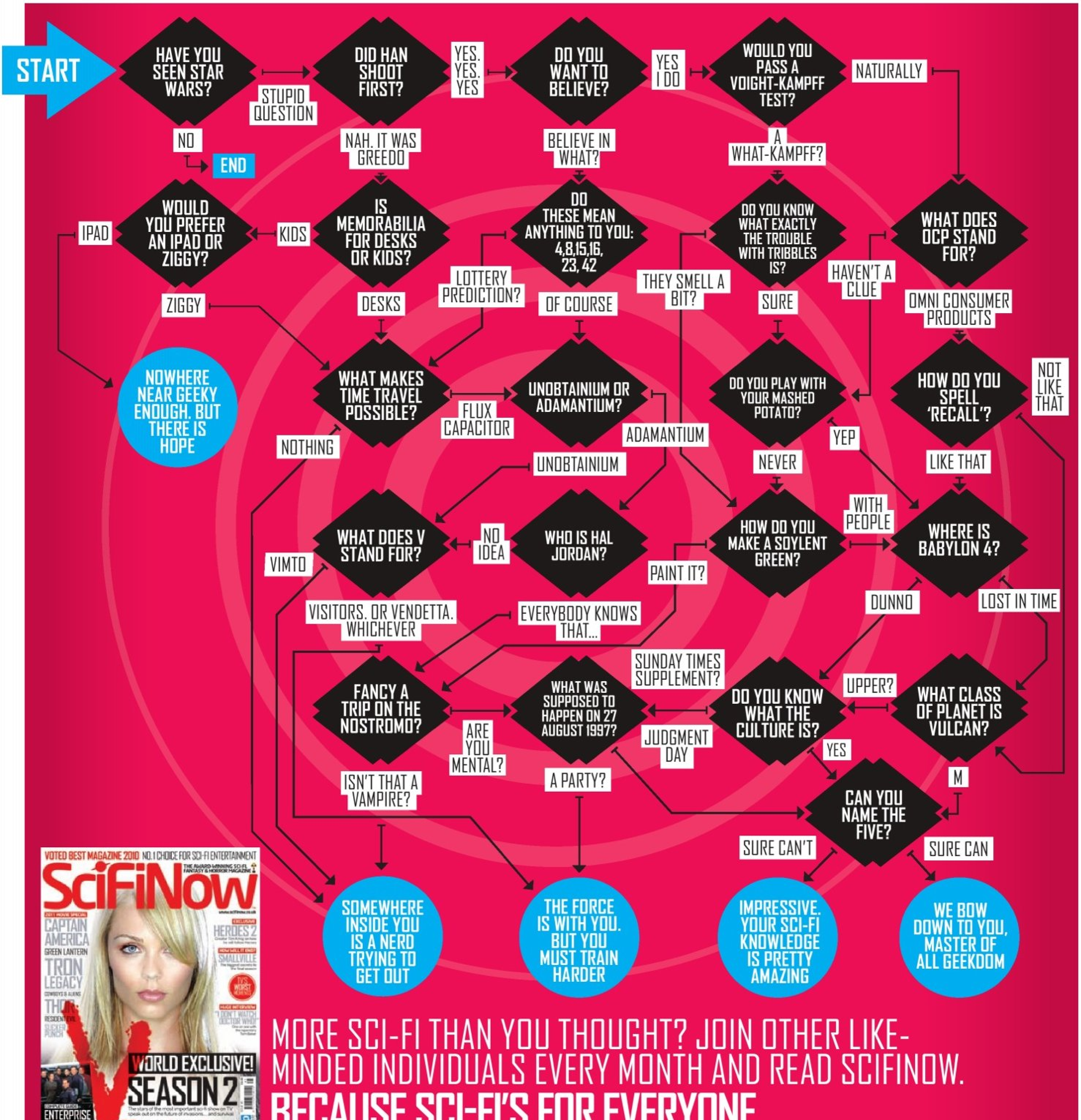
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retro GAMER

nextmonth

» LOAD 82

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With the Super Mario Bros. series reaching its 25th year, we go Mario mad and celebrate gaming's most iconic hero



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



Parker Bros

■ How the famous toy manufacturer branched out into the world of videogames and *Star Wars* licences



Sid Meier

■ With a brand new *Civilisation* on the way, we speak to creator Sid Meier about his 28-year career



Pilotwings 64

■ The creators discuss turning the pseudo-3D wonder into one of the N64's most enjoyable launch games



Eternal Darkness

■ How Silicon Knights turned its long-awaited N64 game into one of the GameCube's greatest survival horror titles

RETRO SPOTLIGHT

RETRO GAMER SPEAKS TO **EGGNCHIPS.COM**



What was the first game you played?
I used to have my own games company when I was at school and made my own games as we couldn't afford the ones in the shops, but two of the first retail games I played were *3D Monster Maze* on the ZX81 and *Chuckie Egg* for the Spectrum, which was given to me when I appeared on the TV show *Freetime*.

What is your best gaming memory?
Saving up my pocket money to buy my first issue of the magazine *Popular Computing Weekly* was pretty close. The people behind Codemasters visited our house once to take a look at my games – they weren't called Codemasters back then, but they did talk about their plans for gaming, and it was a thrill all the same.

Which videogame could you not live without?
One of my all-time favourite games is *Space Adventure* for the BBC Model B. Balancing your energy between life support and your laser blaster always keeps me on the edge of my seat. Also, *Scuba Dive* and *The Pyramid* are favourites. More recently I played *Civilization*, which I just can't put down.

Similarly, what gaming system could you not live without?
All of them. I collect old systems and have quite a collection now including a ZX81, Spectrum, Dragon, BBC, Aquarius, Memotech, Oric and Atari, and the collection is growing. I once had a Jupiter Ace and ZX80 but I had to let them go when times got hard. I miss them now.

When did you set up eggnchips?
eggnchips.com was set up in early 2009 as a sister site to my other blog at **www.jasonslater.co.uk**. My other blog is about small business computing and I needed an outlet, I got talking to a few writers who shared similar interests, and it all went from there.

How did the idea originate?
It took time for the idea of a retro site to emerge as I wasn't really aware about my passion for retro at the time, but articles were leading that way. They were talking about things like *Sapphire & Steel*, *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, *The Time Machine*, and retro games including *Arcadia*, *Vortex*, *The Pyramid* and *Blagger Goes To Hollywood*.

What kind of content can users expect to see on your website?
We have a number of regular features including retro game look backs, the retro show quiz where you have to try and guess the retro TV show, and a regular look at links of the week. We also look at up-to-date things, as sometimes it helps to look back to see the future, so we keep track of social media, online gaming, industry news and online casual games.

What has the reaction to the website been like so far?
The website is growing quickly thanks to everyone who shares our passion, and the scope is widening to include books, comics, emulation, music and science.

What can users look forward to?
More retro stuff! For the future we have some exciting things in the pipeline. The site is getting a retro makeover and we are working on a videocast where we can actually show a lot of the things we talk about. A community forum is also coming shortly and we have a busy Facebook page. Finally, we are also on the lookout for exciting new writers. Whether you only have one thing to say or like to talk about retro stuff as much as we do, you are welcome over at **eggnchips.com**.


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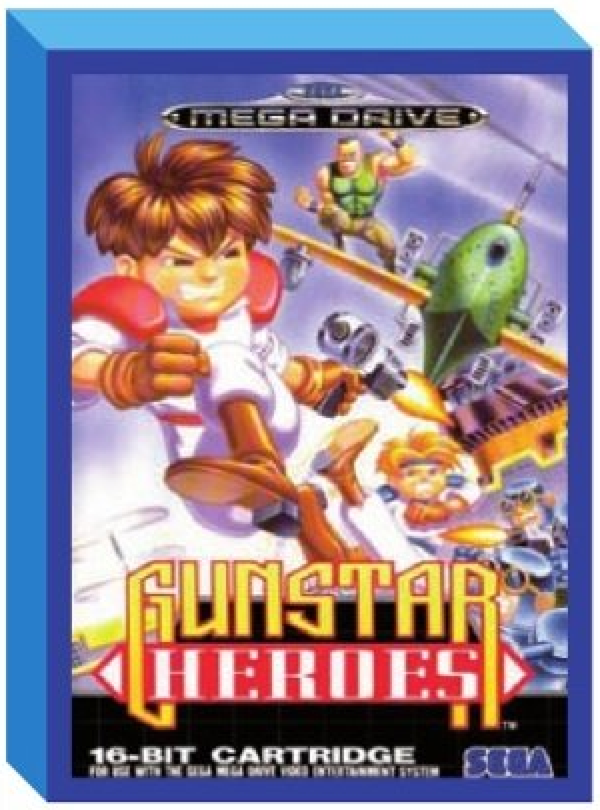

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ENDGAME



GUNSTAR HEROES

» Considering that it's arguably the greatest 16-bit run-and-gun game, we couldn't quite believe that we hadn't already featured Gunstar Heroes in End/Game. In fact, we still don't believe it, despite checking the back page of each issue. But we've decided to roll with it this month anyway and stick our heads on the chopping block.



01

» With Golden Silver beaten by Gunstar Red, the punkish-haired tyrant makes his excuses and escapes though a convenient hatch that leads to space. Scratch this down to experience, Red: never fight a super-weapon near an open window.



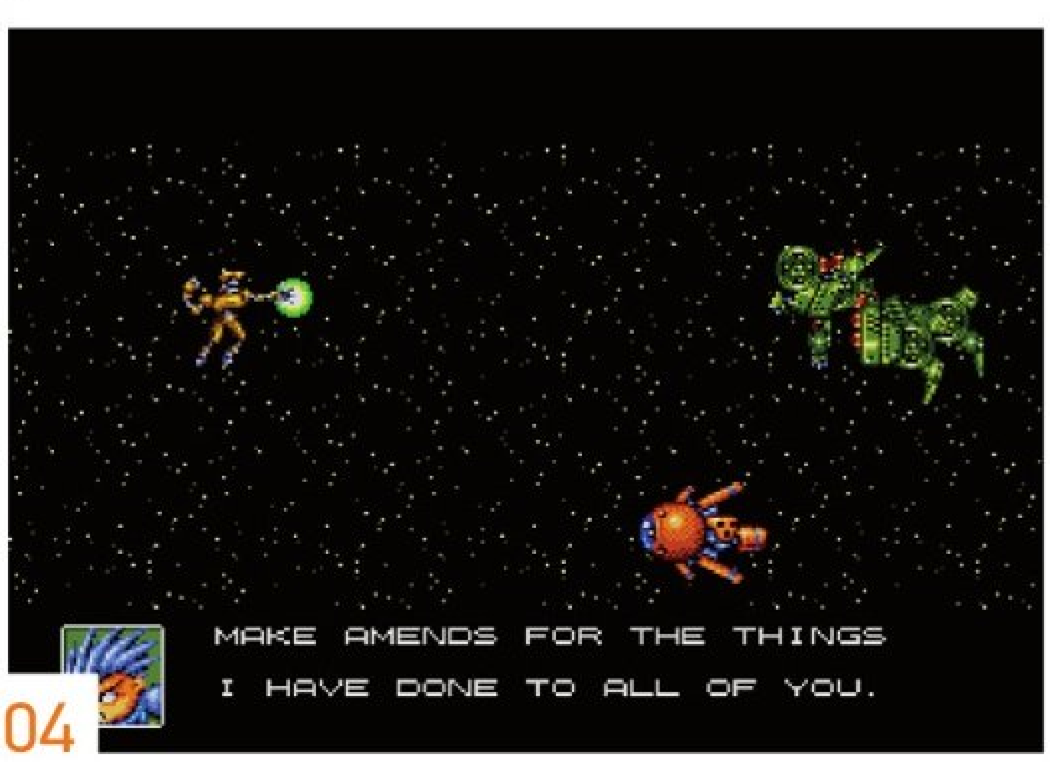
02

» Our hero hitches a lift aboard the team's spaceship. They catch up with Golden Silver, but they're not the only ones in pursuit. The penny drops that awakening something dubbed the 'terrible destructor' is a recipe for terrible destruction.



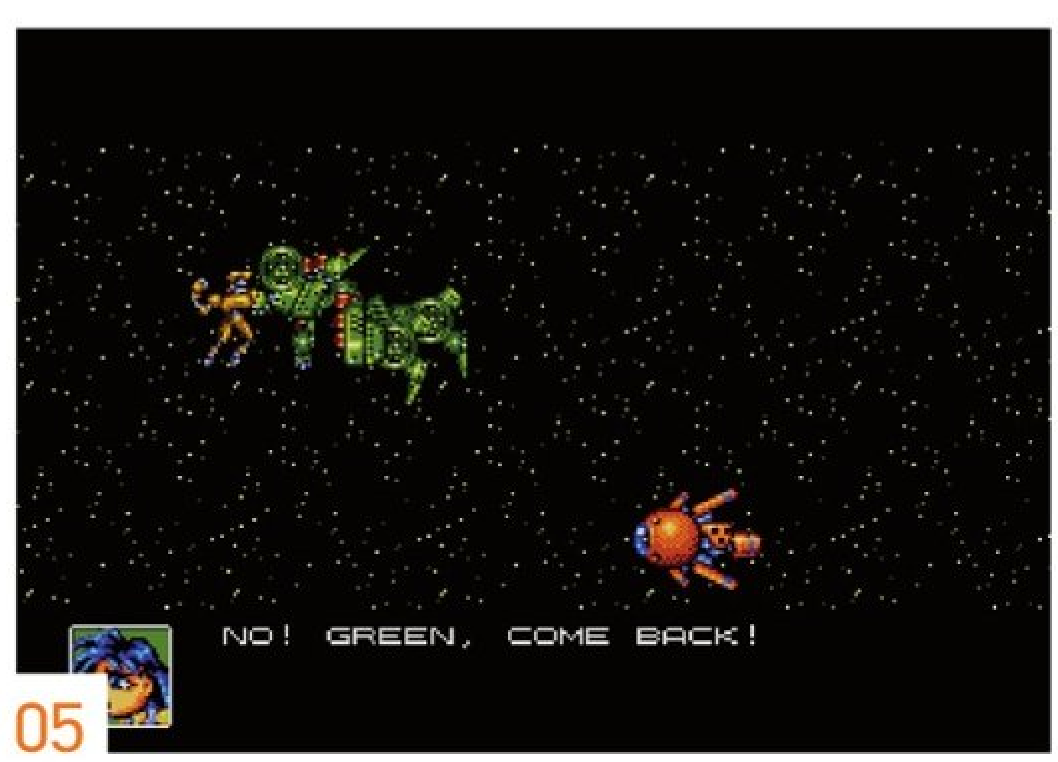
03

» After brushing aside Grey's men, the team fly into panic stations when they realise that their ship doesn't have any weapons. Red then comes up with the idea to wind down the window and attack using the ship's stapler. The team agree.



04

» But just as Red starts reloading the stapler, a message on the ship's com unit flashes up. It's Green, the Gunstar twins' older brother. Feeling guilty for attempting to kill his brothers and destroy the planet, he has his own plan to stop Golden Silver.

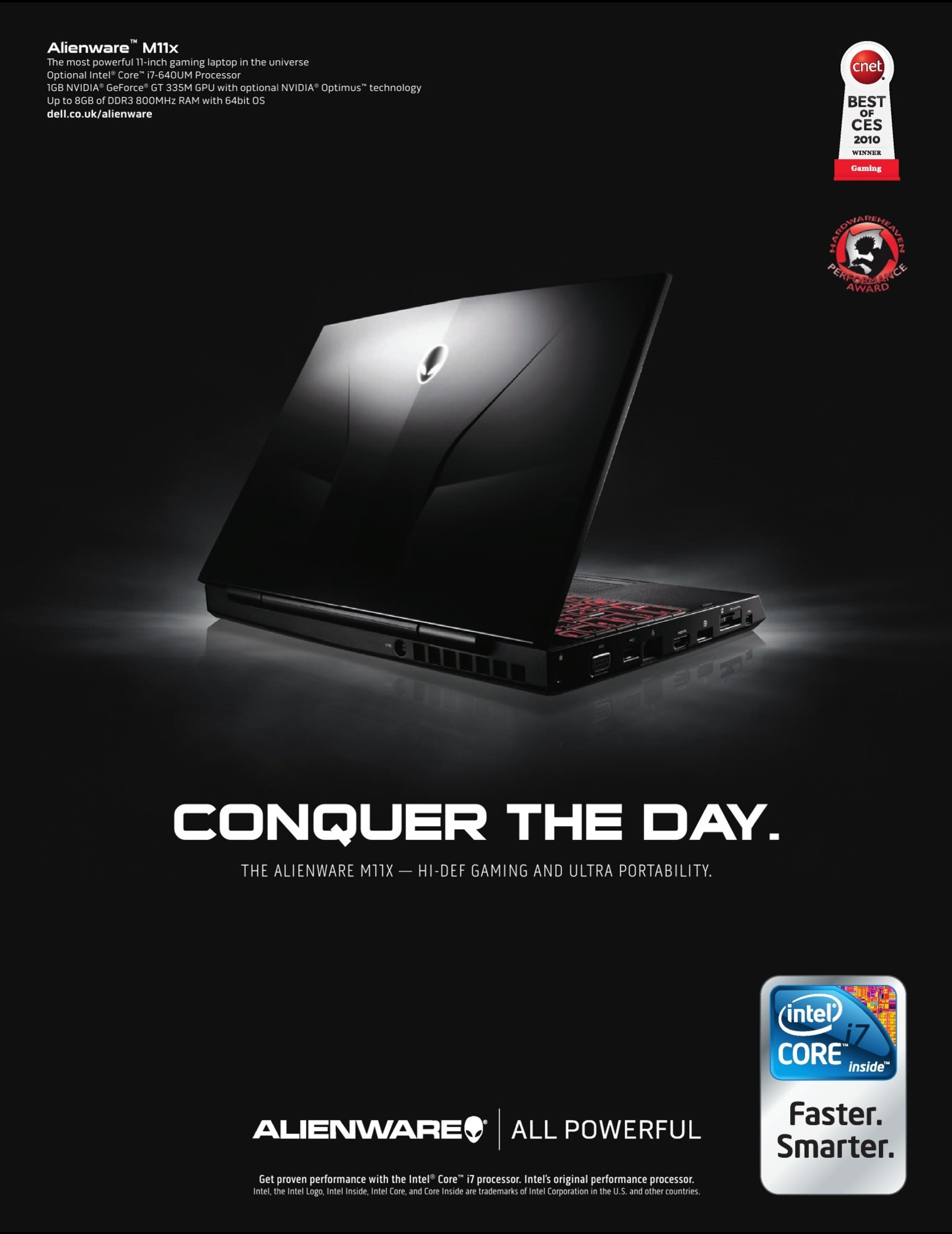


05

» In an act of selflessness, Green steers Seven Force straight into the path of Golden Silver and takes his own life, much to the dismay of Gunstar Yellow. The world may be safe once again, but we were itching to see how that staple plan would play out.



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